



1Peter - Lesson 2B

Chapter 2:11-17

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- When you are in a new place meeting new people, we're always mindful of the importance of making a good first impression, aren't we?
 - This is never more true than when we are traveling to a foreign country

Barbara Bush once accompanied her husband, President George Bush, on a state visit to Japan. During a formal luncheon at the Imperial Palace in Tokyo, she found herself seated beside Japan's Emperor Hirohito, the emperor who had presided over Japan during WWII.

Barbara noted the palace's youthful and modern appearance. She asked the emperor, "Was the former palace so old that it crumbled?"

"No," Hirohito tersely replied, "I'm afraid that you bombed it..."

- That's not the kind of first impression you want to make
 - Especially when you're representing your country
 - In fact, countries usually rely on professional diplomats to make good impressions on behalf of their nation
 - Like our ambassador to the United Nations
 - Well, except for the day...

...in 1948, when Warren Austin, America's Ambassador to the United Nations, urged the warring Arabs and Jews to sit down and settle their differences peacefully... "like good Christians."

- Again, probably not the best impression for an ambassador to make
 - It's important that we make a good impression, especially when we are representing our home country to a foreign people
- Do you remember at the very beginning of this letter, Peter called his readers two things:
 - First, he called us chosen people
 - And he called us resident aliens, foreigners
 - We've already studied what Peter meant by chosen
 - In Chapter 1 and then the first part of Chapter 2, Peter said it meant we are to be holy
 - Set apart
 - A priesthood serving God's temple, the Body of Christ
 - Peter's expectation was that we would live in a manner worthy of that call
 - Living our whole lives as chosen people should
- Well, today, we move into a new section of Peter's letter
 - In this new section, Peter describes what it means to be an alien, a foreigner living on earth
 - About how our Lord expects us to conduct ourselves while we remain here

awaiting the arrival of Christ's kingdom

1Pet. 2:11 Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul.

1Pet. 2:12 Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.

1Pet. 2:13 Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority,

1Pet. 2:14 or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right.

1Pet. 2:15 For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men.

1Pet. 2:16 Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God.

1Pet. 2:17 Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king.

- Peter begins this section by saying again, we are aliens
 - As aliens, there are certain things we don't do and certain things we should do
 - If you are traveling overseas, and if you want to make a good impression
 - There are certain things you don't do and certain things you should do
 - Example: If you are in England, one thing you don't do is drive on the right side of the road
 - Another thing you don't do is eat English breakfast food, like blood sausage
 - On the other hand, you should bow to the queen and you should have tea at 4:00pm in the afternoon
 - Now here again, Peter calls us aliens
 - In other words, we are living in a strange land
 - We may have been born here physically
 - And for a time we thought of earth as our home
 - And we had no idea there was anything more
 - But now, as Christians, we have been born again by the Spirit into a living hope, into a heavenly citizenship
 - So now we belong elsewhere, even though for a time we still live here
 - While we may understand and even agree with this principle
 - It's another thing entirely to live according to it
- In verse 11 Peter begins by speaking from the negative point of view
 - In other words, Peter is going to begin by telling us what an alien living in a foreign land should NOT do
 - In verses 12 and onward, he will describe the positive perspective of what an

alien should do

- In fact, the positive runs all the way into Chapter 4
- So let's first look at what Peter says believers should not do if we are going to live properly as aliens
 - Peter says abstain from the lusts of the flesh for they wage war with the soul
 - Here again, another warning against sinning by allowing our flesh to rule over us
 - This is similar to his earlier warnings
 - But this time Peter is going to use the point to go a new direction
 - He uses the Greek word *apecho* for abstain
 - Which means "to hold back"
 - We need to hold back these lusts
 - Restrain ourselves
 - I picture a traveler who is about to say something rude, and then suddenly remembers his manners, and holds back
- Since this is at least the second time Peter has mentioned lusts, maybe we should define what lusts of the flesh look like
 - Paul gives us the list in Galatians 5

Gal. 5:19 Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality,
Gal. 5:20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions,
Gal. 5:21 envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

- I don't need to take time to define each one of these
 - Some of your translations will use slightly different words, which might be helpful in understanding them better
 - But I think it's sufficient to note that all of these are desires that arise out of our flesh nature
 - And they are the antithesis of love – agape
 - What do I mean by antithesis?
 - Well, these are actions that cannot coexist with love
 - They are like fire and water
 - One cancels out the other
 - We cannot indulge in these desires and simultaneously show agape love
 - For example, I cannot show my wife love if at the same time I harbor jealousy, anger, envy

- I cannot simultaneously show love for my Christian brothers and sisters and also stir up disputes, enmities, or dissensions
- I cannot simultaneously show love to the unbelievers I meet if I also promote sensuality (lewdness), sorcery, drunkenness, carousing
- These are desires that arise from our flesh, not from the Holy Spirit living in us
 - Remember Christ's commands?
 - Love your God
 - Love your neighbor
- If we indulge in these behaviors, then we have by necessity put aside love
 - We have become the world in our behavior
 - Paul says those who practice these things will be judged for them
 - To practice means to live according to them, to make them a way of life
 - That's what the unbeliever does
 - When we succumb to these lusts, we are living like the unbelieving world
 - This is why Peter says that these lusts wage a war for our souls
 - He's referring to the way our flesh is naturally opposed to holiness and to God in general
 - And for as long as you occupy your earthly body, you will experience this war
 - Your flesh fighting with your spirit for control
 - In that battle, your flesh is like a man being drowned slowly
 - It will continue fighting for air until the day God puts it to rest
 - In the meantime, God has called us to wage that war and to win so that we might represent Him to this lost and dying world
 - If you think about it, Peter is just asking the church to live in a manner that's consistent with the customs and traditions of our home country
 - And our home country is heaven now
- For example, imagine if you were an explorer who travels to some deep jungle or forest and comes upon an undiscovered tribe
 - And in this foreign culture you observe many unfamiliar customs
 - Perhaps they eat strange things
 - Perhaps they wear strange clothing
 - Perhaps they practice strange family rituals
 - Bizarre things, like the teenagers picked up their rooms
 - Family members fought over who got to do the dishes
 - Regardless of what you found, you would continue to follow your own culture
 - You would still prefer to eat meals like those you had at home
 - You would continue to wear dress that was familiar and appropriate to your culture

- You would continue to conduct your family life according to your customs and beliefs
- In other words, you would live in their world, but you would not be of that world
 - We would remain distinct; you would remain who you are
- That's all Peter is asking for from his Christian readers
 - Peter says we are aliens and strangers, so we should live according to the customs of our home rather than of this strange place we find ourselves
 - Now there is a difference between our situation and the example I gave
 - We didn't leave our home and travel somewhere new
 - The new came to us
 - In fact, we have yet to visit our home
 - So the temptation to return is very strong
 - That's the war being waged for our souls
 - But because we are still residing temporarily in the old world, we have a job to do here
 - We are here to represent our kingdom to this world and do it properly
 - We are now the ambassadors for Christ

2Cor. 5:17 Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

2Cor. 5:18 Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation,

2Cor. 5:19 namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

2Cor. 5:20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

- So how should an ambassador act?
 - In verse 12 Peter begins with a long discourse on how an ambassador should act
 - First, he says keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles
 - What does Peter mean by Gentiles?
 - Peter could have simply meant that Jewish believers who received this letter should carry themselves in an upright way among the Gentile nations in which they found themselves
 - But I think Peter is making a much broader point here
 - Peter is talking about how the church is viewed by the surrounding pagan culture of Rome
 - Peter says in verse 12 that his readers were being slandered by this group of Gentiles

- The Gentiles were calling the readers “evildoers”
 - The Greek word for evildoer is *kakopoios*, which is a common word for criminal
 - Christians were being slandered – unjustly called criminals
- And Peter suggests that this slander was the basis for the persecution
 - That the persecution came because the populace believed the reports that these Christians were criminals
 - We can assume that many of these reports were false or were exaggerations
 - But Peter is begging the church here in verse 12 to keep to excellent (or commendable) behavior so as to give no credibility to these accusations
 - For they were living in dangerous times
- At about the time of Peter’s letter, about AD 64, the Roman emperor Nero had begun to persecute Christians
- The persecution was brought about by a fire that broke out in the early morning of July 19, AD 64 in a small shop by the Circus Maximus
 - It spread rapidly to other regions of Rome, where it raged for nine days, destroying much of the city
 - The fire was the worst in a series of fires that ravaged the crowded city of more than a million people
 - Living in tightly packed apartment blocks of wooden construction, set along narrow streets and alleyways
 - Only two areas remained intact;
 - One of them was the "Transtiberum" region, the region across the Tiber River, called today "Trastevere"
 - It had a large Jewish population, including Jewish Christians
 - Nero was at his seaside villa in Anzio when the fire began and delayed returning to the city
 - Legend said that at the news of the fire, he began composing an ode comparing Rome to the burning city of Troy
 - His indifference to the suffering caused by the tragedy turned people against him;
 - Rumors began that the emperor himself set the fire in order to rebuild the city from his own plans
- It was well known that Nero disliked much of Rome
 - He thought the city was squalid and needed re-building
 - To stop the rumors of his complicity in the fire, Nero decided to blame someone else:
 - He chose a group of renegade Jews called Christians
 - They had caused trouble before and they already had a bad reputation in the city
 - About the year AD 49, the Emperor Claudius had banished some of them

from Rome for causing upheavals in the Jewish synagogues of the city with their disputes about Christ

- The ancient Roman historian, Tacitus describes the persecution of Christians this way:

Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace.

Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular.

Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind. Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths.

Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired.

- We'll probably never know what trouble these Jewish Christians may have caused in Rome
 - And almost certainly, many of the accusations were false
 - But it is also likely that there was some basis for truth
 - Especially with regard to the conflict that often arose between Jews and Christians
 - Rumors are always most effective when there is some credibility or basis for the accusation
- In the face of this persecution, what does Peter ask from the Christians?
 - Excellent behavior:
 - Live in such a way that we do not give support to their slanderous accusations
 - Be good neighbors
 - Don't do the very things they claim Christians do
 - And this will glorify God in the day of their visitation
 - It's interesting that Peter doesn't promise they will escape persecution by living in an excellent way
 - Doing the right thing is no guarantee of bliss, but it certainly helps
 - Instead, he points forward in time, saying they will glorify God in a day when God visits their enemies
- This can happen in one of two ways
 - Either these Gentiles will be converted by witnessing the faithfulness of Christians

and Christian martyrs

- And if so, they will give glory to God in the day of resurrection when the faithful will be gathered to Christ
- They will glory in how God used the Christians to bring conversion
- Or these Gentiles will not become believers and yet they will give God glory the day they stand before God in judgment
 - At the Great White Throne judgment
 - When every knee will bow

Phil. 2:9 For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name,
Phil. 2:10 so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
Phil. 2:11 and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

- There is no such thing as an unbeliever
 - There are believers and not-yet-believers
- Peter goes on in verse 13-17 to define excellent behavior in specific ways
 - It means submitting for the Lord's sake to every human institution
 - Whether king, or governors
 - Meaning you submit to the man in charge or to his representatives
 - To all forms of human government, in other words
 - This was a challenging expectation
 - Peter is essentially demanding that Christians who were experiencing persecution or who were about to experience it should submit to it
 - There is no qualification here
 - Peter doesn't say submit as long as the government is doing the right thing or is doing what we want it to do
 - I often think back to the Alabama judge who defied the law in keeping the monument to the 10 commandments in the court house
 - If I understand Peter's message here, we should submit to these authorities under virtually all circumstances
 - Even when the decisions of the government seem to go against God's heart
 - Consider Peter's own letter
 - He's saying, support the Roman government
 - The one killing Christians
 - The one worshipping pagan gods
- The only exception I can find in scripture for when a Christian can oppose a

government is when that government directs us to violate God's commands to us in His word

- Peter himself disobeyed authority when it conflicted with God's direction

Acts 4:18 And when they had summoned them, they commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.

Acts 4:19 But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge;

Acts 4:20 for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard."

Acts 5:27 When they had brought them, they stood them before the Council. The high priest questioned them,

Acts 5:28 saying, "We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and yet, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and intend to bring this man's blood upon us."

Acts 5:29 But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men.

- Peter and John could defy this government order because it was an order attempting to silence their faith
 - But Peter's readers are in trouble because they are disturbing the peace and acting as criminals in the eyes of the public
 - This is a problem with their witness
- It's clear in reading these verses that the church in Peter's day had been abusing its freedom in Christ
 - Look at verses 16 & 17
 - He tells them not to use their liberty in Christ as a covering – an excuse – for their evil
 - They understood they had certain liberties in Christ
 - They no longer had to live under the law of the day
 - But they had taken that to mean nor did they have to submit to a pagan government
 - They misused this freedom as an excuse to disobey civil authorities
 - They appealed to a higher authority and claimed they didn't have to obey Caesar
 - Peter says this was wrong
 - This is why I say that the judge in Alabama was wrong
 - God's word doesn't demand that we post the 10 commandments in our court house
 - God's word only demands that we keep His commandments
 - His witness for Christ was not made better by his defying of the courts, it was made worse

- Rather than abuse our freedom in Christ, we must be on our best behavior and submit to governments
 - And Peter gives us three reasons why
- First, because in verse 15 it is the will of God that these men rule over us
 - We are submitting ourselves to these authorities for the Lord's sake, because it is the will of God
 - These institutions exist by the will of God
 - They rule because he placed them in power

Rom. 13:1 Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.

Rom. 13:2 Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.

- When we rebel against government, we actually rebel against God in the sense that we rebel against his will
 - This isn't to say that we should never oppose governments in a legal manner
- The second reason we honor these authorities is that we silence the attacks of foolish men (verse 15)
 - If the church displays excellent behavior as a group, then it will give no credibility to the accusations of those intending to tear it down
 - Remember how Nero and his supporters used accusations of civil disobedience as a pretense to persecute Christians
 - And if a false accusation is going to be believed, it usually needs to be based in some kind of truth
 - Peter says don't give them a basis for making their accusations
 - Just remember, we won't necessarily prevent our own persecution
 - But if every individual in the church kept their behavior excellent and submitted to authority
 - The effect overall would be to undermine the accusations and silence these critics
- Finally, we obey governments and act in an excellent way because by our witness we may bring some men to know the truth
 - We already noted in verse 12 where Peter says that they might give God glory over our witness
 - But I also want to close today with an additional thought on how our obedience to authority is important to God's plan for salvation
- In 1 Timothy 2, Paul tells Timothy that God is not partial in bringing men to salvation:

1Tim. 2:1 First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and

thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men,

1Tim. 2:2 for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity.

1Tim. 2:3 This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior,

1Tim. 2:4 who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

- When Paul says pray for all men, he defines more specifically what he means by all men in verse 2
 - For kings and all who are in authority
 - And look at Paul's reasons for why we do such things
 - First, like Peter's advice, Paul says it will help us lead tranquil lives
 - Because we won't run afoul of the government and bring persecution upon ourselves
 - Secondly, and here's the main point, because God is not a respecter of persons
 - He includes in His plan of salvation the potential for all kinds of men to be saved, including kings and authorities
 - Since we do not know who God intends to call into faith, we can't rule out the possibility that God may use us to convert a king or governmental official
- We must not waste an opportunity to witness to these men just as we take care to witness to the lowest in society
 - And witnessing to a man in authority means showing obedience to authority
 - Try witnessing for Christ to your boss after you have failed to follow his direction
 - Try witnessing to a police officer as he writes you a speeding ticket
 - Try witnessing to a judge as he pronounces sentence for your crime
 - Try witnessing to the IRS agent when he finds you cheating on your taxes
 - So we are to be excellent in our behavior, obeying authorities over us so that we might be free from accusation, we might witness to Christ effectively, and so that we might obey the will of God
- Next week we will cover significant ground, looking at Peter's specific recommendations for how servants, wives and husbands should demonstrate excellence in their behavior
 - Bring your spouse and your servant
 - And if they are one and the same, then be prepared to stay late for some counseling