



In the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, there was a Christian by the name of Justin Martyr. His last name wasn't "martyr," but it was given to him because he was killed for his faith in Jesus in AD 162. Before that point in time, he was a strong defender of the Christian faith. He even spoke on behalf of Christians before the Emperor because there were many foolish arguments laid against Christians at the time. There were arguments that Christians were atheists because they didn't worship the Roman gods. Others said that Christians practiced incest because they called each other "brother" and "sister," and there was confusion over what happened when Christians gathered together. In addition, there was also an accusation that Christians were cannibals because it was said that Christians gathered together to eat the body and drink the blood of someone. Like wildfire, these types of rumors spread, and Justin sought to address these concerns to the Emperor – showing the Emperor that Christians were not doing what was being claimed of them.

As Justin wrote his letter to Emperor Pius regarding the falsity of the claims against Christians, Justin encouraged the Emperor to actually look at the Christian's lives – not merely listen to speculation. He stated that Christians aren't bad for society. Instead, he wrote that "Christians could be trusted to obey Roman law lest they incur divine wrath. [He also called]. . .Pius to study Christian sexual behavior carefully, for the believers' upright ethic proved their goodness" (quoted from <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/justin-martyr/>).

What if Christians were under persecution today in America and someone wrote to the President and said, "President, we are good for society. Just look at how Christians live their lives. The believers' upright ethic proves their goodness"? I think in our era, many may want to leave the Christians out of it. Don't look at our behavior. Others might want to justify their sinful demeanor in the public sphere because they think the end justifies the means. But neither of these responses are correct. As we have gone through Daniel 1-6, I've mentioned Peter's teaching to Christians on us being exiles and sojourners. We've seen how Christians are to relate to exiled Jews and how they responded in the world. Now, this morning, we're going to go straight to Peter's words. We're going to see that our behavior matters in this world.

Before I go further, I can hear some people say, "I hope this isn't a legalistic sermon." To that I'd say, "I hope it's not either." But please understand that calls to godly behavior isn't legalistic. Legalism is acting and behaving in order to gain God's approval. That's the wrong approach. The Scripture's teach us (and Peter emphasizes in these verses) that because Jesus has rescued us we are set free to live godly lives in this present age. If you have turned from your sinfulness and turned to Jesus for forgiveness of sins and relationship with God, then you are accepted – not because of what you've done but because Jesus took the punishment we deserved and has given us his righteousness. So, we are accepted! Because we're accepted that leads to a changed life. And, Peter goes even further to say that how we live in this age is one of the greatest testimonies to the world that there actually is a God who saves and transforms people! The big idea of this sermon today is that **As God's people, God's will is that we serve this world**

**so the world will know God.** Now, let's get to some backdrop to the text we're looking at today in 1 Peter 2:11-17.

### **Background**

Peter's writing to believers in Asia Minor who are suffering. Up to this point in the letter, he has emphasized the Christian's privileged status as those saved by God. Now we come to a transition of the letter. It could be said that the last chapter and a half was the introduction and now we are at the body of the letter. Peter has been reminding Christians of God's grace towards them for a reason. God doesn't give grace so that we would maximize ourselves. No. If we understand God and his grace, then we realize that God's fame ought to be our all-consuming passion. We want to make him known because he's all-glorious. This is Peter's emphasis. In verse 9, we read: But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.<sup>1</sup> What is all the knowledge of our salvation and all the blessings of our salvation to cause us to do? Look at verse 9. We are a chosen race, etc, so *that* we would proclaim the excellencies of God! Do you hear that, Ventura? And, if you're here today saying, "Wow, God is selfish," then you are missing it. If you're here today saying, "I can be a Christian and not talk about God with others," I think you're missing it, too! God is the greatest of all things and beings! He is the culmination of all wonders and splendor! To know God is to know all the summation of all that is good, beautiful and best! If you know God, you cannot hide him. You cannot not talk about him! So, Peter states that we're rescued by God and given all the privileges of being God's so that the result would be we would proclaim him – and then others might know his awesome splendor, too! God gets the glory. We get joy!

This takes us back to what I said about Justin Martyr? What Peter wrote in 1 Peter 2:11-17 probably highly affected what Justin wrote to the Emperor. Our lives must be different if we've tasted that the Lord is good. We ought to be people who say, "We're not perfect, but you can look at our lives and see that God is changing us!" Can you see that he has taken me from darkness and transferred me into his marvelous light? But what does this mean? What does living in his marvelous light *in this fallen world* look like? **As God's people, God's will is that we serve this world so the world will know God.** So, let's jump into the first point of this sermon.

#### **1. Christians are God's people (v. 11).**

Do you know your identity? Why does it matter to know who you are and who you belong to? Practically speaking, we tell ourselves a story. We're often the center of the story, and we tell ourselves who we are and how we fit into the story. Some of us tell ourselves that we're losers and misfits. Others say we're the heroes and we know it all. The goal of our story might be to be successful, make more money, get married, have children, get a nice house. What's your story? What role do you play? How do you view yourself? This story will affect how you behave and what you think you need to do today or tomorrow or next week or next year.

What we're taught in the Scripture is that our story isn't central. Instead, if you have turned to Jesus for reconciliation with God, then you're given life in God and you are made part of God's story! As a part of God's story, you are brought into eternal life! Now, as part of his story, God defines you. What does he say about you? This is of utmost importance! How does he view you? And how would that then shape your view of what to do today, tomorrow or next year?

When we start off verse 11, we read three characteristics of the readers: **Beloved, sojourners, exiles.** Ponder these realities. God, the One who could have justly sentenced us to eternal condemnation, is the

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<sup>1</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Pe 2:9.

One who page-by-page tells anyone who turns to Jesus that we are no longer who we once were, and that we are gloriously loved! We are gloriously loved not because we have done so much to earn the title of beloved. No. We are loved by God and thus we are given the identity of beloved, sojourner and exile.

Let's briefly look at each one and then we'll put them together for greater understanding. First, we have the term "beloved. In Mark 1, we read the story of Jesus' baptism and after he is baptized, we read of the Spirit descending on him like a dove. Then we read, "Then a voice came from heaven, You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."<sup>2</sup> Jesus is the beloved. He is the dearly loved one by God. Then, here in this chapter, Peter reveals to us that because we have been saved by Jesus, we too are beloved sons and daughters of God! We are precious to God. Just let that sink in, Ventura.

Peter doesn't stop here, though. He goes on and gives two more titles of identity. We are sojourners and pilgrims. Putting these titles together we start to understand the tension we feel some days. We're dearly loved by God and yet we're sojourners? We're exiles? How can those realities coincide? If I'm dearly loved of God, shouldn't I be the most victorious in this world and shouldn't Christians rule over all other people? No. As we've seen in Daniel, exiles are citizens of a homeland, but they live in another country. God always loved Daniel, yes? Absolutely. Yet, Daniel lived in Babylon for 70 years, serving under three rulers. He did this knowing that Babylonians (and their rulers) needed to know the One True God.

The same is true for us. Christians live in countries all over this globe, but we are not ultimately citizens of the countries we're born in. Our ultimate citizenship is in Heaven. The words "sojourner" and "exile" clearly give an idea of being "foreign." In Genesis 23:4, we read of Abraham saying of himself, "I am a sojourner and foreigner among you. . ."<sup>3</sup> Peter, in using Old Testament phraseology with these believers in Asia Minor, is making a very important point to all of us today. Our temptation could be to say, "I'm a citizen of Heaven; so, give me my rights on earth," but that's not what an exile does. Instead, an exile lays down their rights to point earthly citizens to a heavenly citizenship. When Peter says that we're sojourners and exiles, he reveals something very important. And here I think we may start to struggle because I believe in America, we Christians can sometimes become quite hostile in "fighting" for our rights in America. And while we live in a nation of great privilege which allows us to speak up, I also believe that we must be purposeful in all of our communication to remember that we are still sojourners and exiles. The song is right, "This world is not my home. I'm just a'passin' through." Let's be most concerned to communicate the Kingdom of Heaven in our words and actions. This is Peter's point!

We need to see ourselves in light of being citizens of the Kingdom. Our citizenship in this world must be shaped more by the Kingdom values of the Sermon on the Mount than by a worldly government's founding documents. We are shaped by being dearly loved exiles and sojourners in this world. We're on our way home and we're wanting to call other people there with us. So, what does it look like to live in such a way as to call other people to God's Kingdom with us? This moves us to the second point of the sermon:

## **2. God's will is that we serve this world (vv. 11-14).**

Because we know *who* we are, we must grow to live as such. To be a beloved sojourner and not living like it confuses the whole story! But listen carefully, Peter isn't saying, "Prove you're a beloved sojourner." He's also not saying, "You've done a horrible job. Now work hard to prove how sorry you are, and maybe you'll be beloved again." No. Peter reminds them again of God's storyline and how they

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<sup>2</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Mk 1:11.

<sup>3</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ge 23:4.

already fit into that storyline. Notice too that Peter isn't merely saying, "Because we know who we are, we can now know how we ought to live." We haven't just been given a roadmap on how to live. We've been given the empowerment to actually live it out.

So, let's seek God's wisdom on how He calls us to live. Look at the end of verse 11 through verse 12 with me: abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> Peter begins with the negative and says that we are to abstain from passions of the flesh. When we hear the phrase "passions of the flesh," we can immediately think of our culture and the scantily clad women on billboards or the readily available pornographic content. This definitely plays a role in fleshly lusts, but there's so much more to this. This word "flesh" carries ideas of domination or power. What desires control you? Who or what controls you?

Any of those desires that are devoid of absolute dependence on God for everything are controlling desires. We are to abstain from those passions because they steer us away from living for the King of the Kingdom of which we are citizens. This word "abstain" means to keep away from or avoid." Recently I was talking with some other guys and I said that when temptation comes to us, we shouldn't have a conversation with it. We shouldn't debate it. We should treat temptation like we'd treat a telemarketer: hang up! Why would we want to listen to the lies of this world? They promise life, but only give death. Peter says they wage war against our soul. This is something that we need to be keenly aware of. Beloved, listen. When you're tempted to click that link or respond in anger or try to tout yourself as the ultimate spiritual person or when you're tempted to find your worth in getting your task list done or exercising as you're supposed to, I want you to remember, anything done with a fleshly lust wages war against your soul. It keeps you from truly depending on Jesus and experiencing growth in the salvation he's granted to you. We are dearly loved by God! Listen to him. Abstain.

But don't just abstain. Peter calls us to action, too. Peter says that our conduct is to be honorable among the Gentiles. Peter is connecting Christians to the Jews of the Old Testament. They sojourned and were exiled among Gentiles. Now, all who trust Jesus are God's people, and we live "among the Gentiles." This helps us to think about Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses in the wilderness, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego. In each of the Old Testament stories you find that these people followed God and also sought the good of the places they lived. They lived out the truth of Jeremiah 29:7 which says, "**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.**"<sup>5</sup>

To live as exiles means that we live for the good of others. This is what Peter says in verse 12, "having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles." The word honorable means, "good, excellent and beautiful." In the context, Peter is talking about conduct that even the world deems as good behavior. We ought to be concerned about ensuring that our words and actions "minister grace to the hearers" – even unbelievers. We are to be concerned about how we can best help those around us. Peter says that as sojourners – as people living for an eternal home – we actually have the freedom to be able to serve others in this world. How are we free to this? Because this world isn't our home. We don't need to cling to anything in this world because it's all going away in the end anyway, and we will receive an eternal home someday! So, let's testify to the greatness of God through our actions. The passions of this world don't control us. Now, let's do good for our neighbors.

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<sup>4</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Pe 2:11–12.

<sup>5</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2001). (Je 29:7). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

At this point, we could say that this sounds all nice and good. We can talk generically about loving our neighbors, but what happens if we get specific? Peter wants to ensure that the Christians know what he means when he speaks of doing good to others. He genuinely means to do good to *everyone* – whether they’re for us or against us. Peter picks up on the idea of governmental leaders as the first specific example. How do we do good and act honorably in this fallen world? We submit ourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake. Ok, at this point, we say, “Well, what does that mean?” It means much more than what we probably would like to think.

I’m going to go out on a limb here and risk being misunderstood or disagreed with. So, let me give you a story. I still remember many years ago during one presidential election where I was watching one of our national party conventions, and so often during the speech, people were booing in the midst of it. I didn’t feel comfortable with the booing, and the next day I even spoke with another pastor about my distaste for that attitude. The pastor simply responded that’s just a cultural thing and I shouldn’t think much of it. I didn’t take his advice. I still don’t like the booing. But even if I can let that go, I feel as though many Christians carry that type of party attitude in their lives. Christians are too quick to mock, deride or “boo” governmental authorities with whom they disagree. Then sometimes they’ll say the famous line to justify their behavior: I respect the office, but I don’t respect them because they have to earn respect. Tell me, where is that attitude in the Bible? Tell me, even when Paul and Peter knew that Nero was insane and Christians were going to die, did they ever say some foolish statement like that?

Now you may be thinking, “But Pastor Timothy, are you saying we shouldn’t say anything?” No. I believe that in our society, it is right to pinpoint what we believe is right or wrong. But I believe as exiles and sojourners, it also matters *how* we speak and act. It is wrong to speak out in a disrespectful way. Look at the wording in verse 13. We’re told to “be subject.” This means to put yourself willingly in rank under. Connect this with the command to honor Gentiles. Kings and governors are a part of all Gentiles, and we are to honor and respect them. Right now, some of you might say, “I can’t do that!” And, what you mean is you won’t. But I want you to look at the beginning words of verse 15: For this is the will of God. Have you ever prayed to know God’s will? You desperately wanted to know what he wanted you to do. Look at verse 15! We know God’s will. God’s will is to be subject to and honor kings, governors and all gentiles!

We’re not merely to respect people who have earned it. Look at the wording again. Be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution.<sup>6</sup> We submit to the ruler because they’re in an office God had ordained, and they’re going to be judged by God for how they rule! This command also isn’t just “submit yourself to the office of king or governor.” This is submit yourself to everyone in authority, “whether to the king as supreme, or to the governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good.”

At this point someone will say, “But Pastor Timothy, this-or-that governmental leader isn’t punishing correctly or isn’t praising those who do good! Therefore, I don’t have to honor them because they’re not fulfilling their role.” That’s not what’s said here. That’s not how Paul or Peter encouraged believer in the Roman government. The rulers need to know we respect their office because God has placed them there and thus God is their judge! Like Daniel towards Nebuchadnezzar or Belshazzar or Darius, may we serve leaders and point to our Triune God.

But what if we’re persecuted? What if we’re wronged? This leads to the final point this morning.

### **3. God will make himself known to the world (vv. 12, 15).**

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<sup>6</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Pe 2:13.

Peter says when we fulfill our roles, some people will be confounded by our lifestyles and will glorify God in the day of visitation. He also says our actions will silence the ignorance of foolish men. I don't believe this is an exhaustive list per se, but they are some of the results. First, Peter acknowledges that people will speak against us. Don't be shocked that unbelievers are going to NOT believe. Don't be angered. Expect it. They might mock and say we're in the wrong and that all Christians are just hypocrites. Listen to them and seek to love them. In doing these good works, by God's grace, Peter says some will glorify God in the day of visitation.

The day of visitation is that day when Jesus returns. The word "glorify" is in the New Testament 61 times and it's never used to speak of unbelievers who unwillingly offer praise to the Lord. What Peter is saying here is that your obedience to God could be used by God to draw people to the message of the gospel and then save them. Will you trust that the Lord's way of doing things is best? What a privilege that as a sojourner and exile, God will work through us to welcome other sojourners in the journey to Heaven's shores!

The next result Peter states is that our obedience can put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. I still remember hearing a story about a pastor who was concerned about a heavy metal group coming to his town. The singer promoted suicide, and the pastor didn't think it was best for their town to have this group come in; so, he went within the law to try to keep this evening from coming. There were people against him, and this pastor was on TV. Back and forth the two sides went. They had strong beliefs, but what was so encouraging was that the pastor (at least at one point) invited people opposing him out for a meal – his treat. At one point one of the people had basically said that it would be easier to speak against this pastor if he wasn't so nice! That's silencing foolishness. This is how it ought to be always. Yes, we can take strong stances, but our daily life should be honorable!

This exhibits what Peter writes in verse 16. We are to live "as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God." We haven't been saved to live the same old way of life. Yes, we are citizens of Heaven, but we don't claim our rights. Like Jesus who ruled over the Temple and also is God over all, he could have said he wasn't paying taxes. His right is that all should worship him. Yet, he paid taxes. This is what our Savior has done, and he calls his followers to submit to this world like sojourners and exiles. We haven't been saved so that we can have the upper hand in this society. We have been transferred away from slavery to the passions of this world, and now we are bondservants of God Himself to serve him in this world.

Therefore, Peter gives this concluding statement: Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king. This is a great synopsis of how we ought to live. Because of the wording used here, it's a clear delineation of priorities. The center two are combined while the outer two are combined. The center two speak to our relationship in the Kingdom of God. The outer two speak to our relationship with the kingdom of this world. God calls us to both. So, I think Justin Martyr was onto something. He loved God's people, and he spoke of the love and obedience the church exemplified to the Roman world. Why? Because they were dearly loved sojourners.

What a fitting way to move into communion. Of all people to say "Unfair," it would have been Jesus. Yet Jesus proves to us that God's way is best. And so, by faith, we can follow in Jesus' steps in how we live in this world – as exiles, dearly loved by God. **Jesus, who now reigns in Heaven, didn't stop His own execution, but instead allowed it to happen. He followed the Father's will all the way to death. Praise the Lord he did because that death stopped many of us in our tracks, silenced our foolishness and brought us to glory in God Himself! Truly, as God's people, God's will is that we serve this world so the world will know God.**