

Scripture Reading: 1st Peter 2:11-25 (NASB - New American Standard Bible)

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¹³Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, ¹⁴or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. ¹⁵For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men. ¹⁶Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God. ¹⁷Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king.

¹⁸Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable. ¹⁹For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. ²⁰For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God.

²¹For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, ²²WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH [Isaiah 53:9]; ²³and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; ²⁴and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. ²⁵For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.

Good morning, everyone. It is good to see you all again. Today I am continuing in my series going through the First Epistle of Peter, which I started in October. We took a long break during the month of December, but now with the holidays over, we can return to First Peter.

We should take a few minutes to review some of the things we learned in the first two chapters of Peter's letter. Let's look at the opening verses of this letter, 1 Peter 1:1-2a – “¹Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen ^{2a}according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood ...”

The Apostle Peter addresses his letter to people he calls “aliens.” He calls these people “those who reside as aliens ... who are chosen.” The New International Version translates this phrase “To God's elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces ...” Bible commentators say that the idea here is not that these people were literally exiled from somewhere else, but that we Christians reside as aliens/exiles on this earth until we can come to our true home with Christ in the future.

My *ESV Study Bible* has this to say about these people:

Peter is not speaking of a literal exile (cf. 1 Pet. 1:17; 2:11). Believers long for their true home in the new world that is coming and for their end-time inheritance, for they do not conform to the values and worldviews of this present evil age. Believers are not only exiles but God's “elect exiles.” They are his chosen people, just as Israel is designated as God's chosen people in the Old Testament (Deut. 4:37; 7:6-8; Ps. 106:5; Isa. 43:20; 45:4).¹

The audience for this epistle is mostly Gentile Christians, but there are also Jewish Christians among them. In his epistle, Peter frequently uses Old Testament language used for Israel and applies that language to the Christian church.

¹ From the *ESV® Study Bible*, Crossway; study note on 1 Peter 1:1.

Next, I would like to focus on verse 2. Here, we see all three members of the Trinity mentioned. It is God the Father who has chosen us. And it is the work of the Holy Spirit that brings about the sanctification of believers. Sanctification means to be set apart from this sinful world so that we would live holy lives, lives which bring honor to our God.

The third key phrase in verse 2 is that we are chosen so that we would “obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood.” The first step of obedience is our conversion to Christ, when we turn away from our sin and follow Him. And then we commit our lives to following His teachings. This verse also tells us that we are sprinkled with the blood of Jesus Christ. It is His sacrifice on the cross that pays the penalty for our sin.

Continuing in chapter 1, we come to verses 14 and 15 which say, “¹⁴As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, ¹⁵but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior.” This is the fundamental Christian lifestyle: to turn away from our former lives of sin when we indulged various lusts and to turn toward God, the Holy One. We are supposed to reflect His character – and fundamental to this is that we “be holy in all our behavior.”

In chapter 2, Peter says this to his Christian audience in verses 9 and 10 – “⁹But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A ROYAL PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR GOD’S OWN POSSESSION, [Deut. 10:15, Isa. 43:20; Exod. 19:6, Rev. 1:6; Isa. 61:6; Deut. 7:6, Isa. 43:21, Mal. 3:17] so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; ¹⁰for you once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY [Hos. 1:6,9,10, 2:23].”

In my New American Standard Bible, New Testament quotations from the Old Testament are in all capital letters, as you see here on the screen. From various parts of the Old Testament, Peter uses a variety of phrases about God’s chosen people Israel and applies them to the Christian community. We are called “A CHOSEN RACE … A ROYAL PRIESTHOOD … A HOLY NATION … A PEOPLE FOR GOD’S OWN POSSESSION.”

We are chosen. And we are a priesthood, bearing witness to the world to show others the path to a relationship with our Creator. And we are called a holy nation. Holiness is to mark the Christian community.

And with that introduction and review, let us now look in detail at our passage today in the second half of chapter 2. Let’s look at verse 11 and the beginning of verse 12 – “¹¹Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. ^{12a}Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles...” It is from the beginning of verse 12 that I have taken the title of today’s sermon: “Keep Your Behavior Excellent.” *Keep your behavior excellent*. In the English Standard Version of the Bible, this verse reads, “Keep your conduct … honorable” among the Gentiles. Our conduct, our behavior, must be honorable, it must be excellent – among the Gentiles, among the unbelievers and sinners with whom we interact in our society.

Keep your behavior excellent. Keep your conduct honorable.
That is the theme of my message today.

We are children of God the Father, our Creator. We have Jesus Christ as our Lord. We are a royal priesthood and a holy nation. We are supposed to reflect our Father’s character and to no longer indulge the fleshly lusts that we once did. As we read five minutes ago in chapter 1, verses 14 and 15 – “¹⁴As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, ¹⁵but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior.”

Now that we are Christians, how can we continue in sinful practices? If you continue indulging in sin, you damage your testimony among the unbelievers in society. You and I ought to behave with honor and with excellence so that we bring credit to God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let's look again at chapter 2, verse 11. Peter says, "Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul." We are aliens and strangers to this current corrupt world. We are citizens of heaven, as Philippians 3:20 tells us. Peter urges us to abstain from fleshly lusts, not only because we are aliens to this world, but because indulging these lusts "wage war against the soul." They wage war against the soul. Indulging fleshly lusts damages our soul.

When we think about fleshly lusts, the first type of sin that we think of is usually sexual sin. God created sex and designed it to give a man and a woman a desire to unite in marriage and have children. But, now that we live in a fallen world, the desires of our body can lead us to indulge in sexual activities outside of marriage, and the Bible calls this sin. Adultery, fornication, homosexual activity – these are all called sin in the Bible. Adultery is when a married person has a sexual union with somebody they are not married to – both persons are guilty of the sin of adultery. Fornication is a broader term, covering any kind of sexual activity between persons not married to each other. Homosexual activity is condemned in numerous places in both the Old and New Testaments.

Sexual sin doesn't only involve physical, sexual contact between people. Jesus Christ says this in Matthew 5:27-28 – "²⁷You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY'; ²⁸but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart." In Matthew 5, Jesus is concerned with heart motivations and not just people's outward actions. For example, He says that to be angry with your brother can be equated with murder ... and then here in verses 27-28, He says that lusting after a woman can be equated with adultery. Just looking with longing for a woman and desiring her in a sexual way makes you guilty of adultery. Sexual sin is not done just with a physical union with somebody else, but can be done with your eyes and your heart. Looking at a woman lustfully and looking at pictures in pornography magazines are also sexual sin, indulging the fleshly lusts that Peter urges us to abstain from in his letter.

I find the next verse in Matthew quite striking. Matthew 5:29 – "If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell." Jesus is using stark language here, but you don't need to literally cut off a part of your body – I think what He means here that you have to be severe with yourself when faced with this temptation of looking at a woman with lustful desires. Be severe. I found this verse helpful in my younger days. What it means is that you have got to refuse to keep on gazing at that woman with lust – just turn your face away. Yes, I know it's desirable to keep on looking at her, but I learned to be severe with myself and just refuse to enjoy some visual thrills and just turn my face away. It became a habit. Turn your face away. For any of you men with a problem looking lustfully at a woman, I recommend you learn this habit and cut out your right eye if it makes you stumble ... I mean, be severe with yourself and refuse to keep on looking and lusting at women, and just turn your face away.

Peter tells us to "abstain from fleshly lusts." Sexual sin is one big example of fleshly lusts, but not the only example of sinful, fleshly, human appetites. Indulging in too much alcohol leads to drunkenness and carousing and can lead to all kinds of damage – damage to your body and to your relationships. God wants us to be self-controlled, to be controlled by the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 5:18 says, "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit." Proverbs 20:1 – "Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and whoever is intoxicated by it is not wise." Avoid drunkenness.

Another way our body can be misused is by eating too much. Here is another verse which I find quite striking: Proverbs 23:1-2 – “¹When you sit down to dine with a ruler, consider carefully what is before you, ²And put a knife to your throat if you are a man of great appetite.” Really? Is it such a bad thing to like to eat a lot of food? Well, Scripture thinks so: what I read here is another severe verse: overindulgence in food is so serious a matter that you would do well to execute yourself rather than give in to this temptation. If you are tempted to overindulge with food, show some fortitude and just stop yourself. Just refuse to eat more. That is hard to do in today’s world of easy access to all kinds of food. But I think you’ll be happier if you just learn to stop indulging so much.

Let us return to today’s passage in 1 Peter chapter 2 and read verses 11 and 12 – “¹¹Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul. ¹²Keep 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.”

Those fleshly lusts wage war against your soul and damage your soul – stop indulging in them. Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, among the unbelievers in our society. We are children of God and disciples of Christ, so we must live in a way that brings honor to our God and our Lord.

Unbelievers often mock believers. They don’t respect our faith in a Creator, nor do they respect our moral code. They may mock you for not indulging in sex or drugs or alcohol or mock you for obeying all the government’s laws. But when these people mock you, look at what verse 12 says: by their criticism of the good deeds they observe you doing, they “glorify God in the day of visitation.” Their very criticism of your moral stand gives glory to God.

We ought to live excellent lives among the unbelievers in society. We ought to bring honor to our God by being model citizens in our society. It is God’s will that social order be maintained, and we Christians would do well to respect those leaders who have authority over us. The remainder of chapter 2 and the beginning of chapter 3 describe God’s will in three broad areas of human relations: the behavior of citizens to the governing authorities in verses 13 to 17, the behavior of servants to their masters in verses 18 to 25, and the behavior of wives to their husbands in chapter 3, verses 1 to 6, with an admonition to husbands in verse 7. We will look at chapter 3 next week.

Let’s read 1 Peter 2:13-15 – “¹³Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, ¹⁴or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. ¹⁵For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men.”

Verse 15 again – it is “the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men.” This reminds me of verse 12 which I read a few minutes ago: the criticisms of ignorant unbelievers toward our upright behavior ultimately honors God and glorifies Him because they are unwittingly admitting that our conduct is honorable and righteous.

It is God’s will that we Christians conduct ourselves righteously in this world, in this society, even though society is run by imperfect, fallible human beings. Despite the imperfections of our leaders, they basically know right from wrong and they make laws and punish evildoers and sometimes even praise those persons who have contributed positively to society. We Christians ought to live as model citizens.

Of course, Bible commentators of this passage in 1 Peter 2, and related passages such as Romans 13, say that Christians are not obliged to follow every law of the governing authorities if such laws require Christians to break God's commands. God's Word comes first. In Acts chapter 4 when Peter and John were preaching in the temple courts in Jerusalem, the priests and the temple guards arrested them. They were brought before the Jewish Council and they were ordered not to preach in the name of Jesus Christ anymore. Peter and John refused to obey. In Acts 4:19-20 we read this – “¹⁹But 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; ²⁰for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.” They ignored the Council's order and continued to preach about Jesus.

What 1 Peter 2 and Romans 13 tell us is that basically we Christians ought to obey the governing authorities since this is God's will. This is a good testimony to the unbelievers and critics of Christianity.

Let's continue in 1 Peter 2 and read verse 16 – “Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God.” Don't try to use the principle of Christian freedom to ignore laws and even ignore God's moral directives by doing sinful things. We are bondslaves of God: we must obey His commands and live by the Bible's morality. Don't abuse the principle of Christian freedom.

Verse 17 – “Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king.” Four simple principles to live by. Honor every person, because every person is made in the image of God, as we read in Genesis chapter 1. Love your Christian brethren, even though we all have our individual personalities and we may irritate each other sometimes. Honor the king – honor him, even if some kings aren't likable people. And fear God. Fear God – obey Him. A verse that scared me when I was younger was Matthew 10:28 where Jesus said, “Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” Don't fear men, but fear the God who created you and who will give you what you deserve in the end, which would be destruction in hell for those persons who refused to follow God.

Let's move on to the next section. It is also God's will that servants obey masters. 1 Peter 2:18-19 – “¹⁸Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable. ¹⁹For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly.” This finds favor with God when servants respect their masters and obey them, even though some masters are quite mean and unreasonable. Follow your Christian conscience and bear even unjust situations – there is a lot of injustice in the world and sometimes we just have to endure it: by bearing undeserved suffering, you are also being a Christian witness in this world.

But make sure you are doing right actions. If you do wrong, you deserve punishment and deserve no sympathy. Verse 20 – “²⁰For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God.” Patient endurance finds favor with God.

Let us follow the example of Jesus Christ. Verses 21-23 – “²¹For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, ²²WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH [Isaiah 53:9]; ²³and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously.” Christ suffered not only on the cross, but He also suffered during His trial when He was falsely accused, and at other times as well. He also suffered when the soldiers mocked Him, in Luke 22:63-65 and John 19:2-5. But He did not reply to unjust treatment.

Verse 23 here says “He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously.” Jesus entrusted Himself to God the Father, who knows the truth and who judges righteously.

Let’s be reminded again of what Christ did for us on the cross. Verses 24-25 – “²⁴And He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. ²⁵For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.” He loved us so much He died for us and aided our return to the Shepherd and Guardian of our souls.

I find verse 24 remarkable: Jesus died for the guilt of our sins, so that we would die to sin ... so that that **we Christians would die to sin**, and **we Christians would live righteousness lives**. I end where I began today. We are aliens and strangers on this earth, so we should walk according to the morals of our Father in heaven, for we are citizens of heaven. We should live our lives honorably on this earth, being a witness to the Gentiles and unbelievers in our society.

Let me sum up with a review of today’s admonitions:

- Keep your behavior excellent.
- Keep your conduct honorable.
- We are aliens in this world, so we must not follow its sinful ways.
- Peter urges us to abstain from fleshly lusts, for these damage our soul.
- The critics in society wish to mock us, so let us display a good testimony by walking uprightly in this world.
- May we be model citizens in our society by honoring the governing authorities and obeying the law.
- Christ died for our sins, so let us die to sin and not let sin have power over us.