

Standing Fast in the Grace of God

“By Your Good Works”

1 Peter 2:11-17

As Peter told the believers about Christ and their relation to Him, he now points out to them the importance of living a godly Christian life in the sight of others so that the world could see Christ in them, and glorify God. This is a point made throughout the course of Scripture on many occasions.

As stated in the last message in our study, the Holy Spirit directs Peter to move from the believer’s identity in Christ (vs. 6-10) to how we conduct ourselves in a fallen, wicked world. The believers to whom Peter wrote were going to face persecution from the powers that were in authority over them and they needed to understand they still had a duty to do what was right, both in relation to that authority and in relation to their own personal testimony. The same is true for us today. Just because we don’t like the rules, whether they are the laws of the land or other rules we are given, doesn’t mean we have the liberty to go against those rules.

Verse 17 begins with a very endearing term – “Dearly beloved” (*ἀγαπητός*). This is a term common to Peter, used some eight times in his letters. “He addresses the saints under this affectionate appellation, ‘dearly beloved,’ to express his great love to them, and to show that what he was about to exhort them to sprung from sincere and hearty affection for them, and was with a view to their real good...” (Gill).

He then expresses his desire that they heed what he is about to say – “I beseech you...” This is a term of urgency, one that means to beg. It draws attention to the gravity and seriousness to what he is about to say.

He then draws attention again to their position in the world – “strangers and pilgrims.” He’s not only addressing them

as part of the dispersion, but is addressing them in broader terms that includes Gentiles as well. He's telling them, in essence, that because they are citizens of heaven and not of this world that they ought to live as to represent that citizenship.

I. A CALL TO INNER DISCIPLINE – vs. 11c

"Abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul"

A. "Abstain" ($\alpha\piέχομαι$)

1. Present middle infinitive – "deliberately keep yourself away from this." This is to be seen as preventative and not just corrective.
2. Although this appears to be an imperative (command) in English, it is to be understood as something softer, so to speak: he is appealing to believers on the basis of who they are (the first part of the verse shows this).

B. "From fleshly lusts"

Peter is not limiting the term "lusts" to that of immorality (as we almost always understand it in English today). He is speaking of strong desires (the definition of the Greek word, which is a neutral term) that arise from the old nature. Those desires might have felt justified under the stress of the circumstances they were facing, but it was something that worked against their very soul and could damage their testimony.

In this context, those desires would include the impulse to retaliate, to resist authority sinfully, to vindicate oneself at all costs, to assert personal rights over the testimony of Christ, and to answer hostility with hostility.

C. "Which war against the soul"

This indicates an ongoing spiritual conflict (Gal. 5:16-17; Rom. 8:13).

Galatians 5:16-17

¹⁶ This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.

Romans 8:13

¹³ For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.

II. A CALL TO OUTWARD TESTIMONY – VS. 12

A. “Having your conversation” – your behavior or conduct (1:15)

B. “Honest” (καλός)

1. A word most often translated “good” (81 of 97 times it is used).
2. Here, it is good in a moral sense; beautiful; commendable; attractive. Their life, their behavior, was to be a thing of beauty and goodness when viewed by those around them.

C. “Among the Gentiles”

This points back to the first verse of the letter and the primary audience to whom it was written (the believing Jews).

D. “That, whereas they speak against you as evildoers”

That is, the Gentiles, the pagans by whom they are surrounded, and who will most assuredly be watching their conduct.

E. “They may by your good works, which they shall behold”

1. This word for “behold” (*ἐποπτεύω*) is only used here and in 1 Pet. 3:2.
2. It’s a word that means to view with the intent to inspect or watch as an eye-witness.
3. Simply put, the world is watching us closely.

Matthew 5:16

¹⁶ Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

Titus 2:7-8

⁷ In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine shewing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, ⁸ Sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you.

F. “Glorify God” – this is the purpose for why we live like we should.

G. “In the day of visitation”

It seems, as Matt. 5:16 would support, that their living as a Christian and their good works that were seen by those that came to judge them was the very thing that led those that came to judge to see Christ in them – perhaps to even trust Him as their Saviour, which would be the ultimate way to give God the glory.

III. A CALL TO WILLING SUBMISSION – VS. 13-16

A. The command

1. “Submit yourselves” – this is voluntary,

deliberate obedience.

2. We are bound by the mandate of Scripture to take the initiative to put ourselves under the authority of another and be subject to them, and put ourselves in the place of obedience to them.
3. This applies to human authority structures that are established by God in His Word, some of which are seen in vs. 13c-14 (those listed are specifically relative to the situation the believers were facing then).

Romans 13:1

¹ Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.

B. The motive

1. "For the Lord's sake" (vs. 13b) – so that the gospel message is not hindered by the ignorance of man.
2. Submitting to authority ("that with well doing") silences (literally, muzzles or gags) the ignorance of those that oppose believers (vs. 15).
3. We submit (vs. 16b) because we are "the servants of God" now.

C. The boundary (vs. 16a)

1. Christian liberty is not a "cloak" for rebellion. Freedom in Christ never excuses sin.
2. The "liberty" Peter is referencing here seems to be that of the believing Jews that he was addressing and the truth that they were free

from having to follow the Levitical Law. They were not to use that newfound “liberty” as an excuse to violate the principles of Christ simply because it served their purpose.

3. Christian liberty regulates our conduct – it does not remove accountability.

IV. A CALL TO PROPER RELATIONSHIPS – vs. 17

A. “Honor all men” – universal respect

1. This does not mean we are to honor all men equally – the way it is worded in the Greek means we are to honor them as their position dictates.
2. “Honour” (*τιμάω*) means to fix a value upon or to prize. As it relates to “all men,” it simply means we are to be respectful of others.

Romans 12:10

¹⁰ Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another;

Romans 13:7

⁷ Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute *is due*; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.

Philippians 2:3

³ Let nothing *be done* through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.

1 Timothy 6:1

¹ Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honour, that the name of God and *his* doctrine be not blasphemed.

B. “Love the brotherhood”

1. We have a general responsibility to “honor all men” but we have a special responsibility as believers to not just “honor” fellow believers but to “love” (ἀγαπάω) them as well.

1 Peter 1:22

²² Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, *see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently:*

John 13:35

³⁵ *By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.*

Hebrews 13:1

¹ Let brotherly love continue.

2. “Brotherhood” (ἀδελφότης) – this word is only used here and in 1 Pet. 5:9 (“brethren”).

“In Christianity adelphótēs is a brotherhood or sisterhood which has been made possible by Jesus Christ. Since all believers are given the new birth, it is by virtue of that spiritual birth that men and women are truly brothers and sisters” (Zodhiates).

3. We owe it to other believers to treat them like family.

Too many times, we treat others like “outsiders,” like they don’t really belong. That’s the opposite of what this command teaches.

C. “Fear God”

1. This one is primary – it’s a basic principle of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation. No one can rightly respond to God, whether in salvation or sanctification, without a proper fear of Him.

2. The Old Testament equivalent to this is “the fear of the LORD,” found 30 times in the Bible, 14 of which are in the book of Proverbs.

By the term “fear of the Lord” is meant an awe of His authority. As we would say, “We are in awe” of someone’s ability, their strength, their intelligence, etc. The reason the word “fear” is used is because to truly recognize the power of God we would, of necessity, be afraid, terrified, of Him. Awe, or reverence, comes from recognizing Who He is.

Proverbs 1:7

⁷ The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Proverbs 9:10

¹⁰ The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding.

- a) The fear of the LORD is the foundation for knowing Him (Prov. 1:7; 9:10).
- b) The fear of the LORD is a choice (Prov. 1:28-30).
- c) The fear of the LORD is understandable (Prov. 2:1-5).
- d) The fear of the LORD involves a hatred for sin (Prov. 8:13; 16:6; 23:17).
- e) The fear of the LORD brings some practical benefits:
 - (1) Physical help (Prov. 10:27; 19:23; 22:4)
 - (2) Mental help (Prov. 14:26; 15:16)
 - (3) Spiritual help (Prov. 14:27; 23:17)

D. “Honour the king”

A reminder of what he just said concerning those in authority over them. They have a special place of honor due them because of their position.

Conclusion:

Simple question: How are we doing at living as a Christian should?