

1 Peter 2:11-3:12

Believers Urged To Walk In Godliness

SUMMARY OF THE CONTENTS

This part of the letter is a continuation of chapter 2:1-10. Peter continues to urge the believers to reveal themselves in word and deed as *Ammi*, "My people"; people who can be called *Ruhamah*, that is "she has obtained compassion". He therefore, gently but firmly, admonishes them anew to forsake all unrighteousness, and in all spheres of life – in political, social, family, and Church relationships – to reveal themselves as followers and slaves of the Lord Jesus Christ who has redeemed them out of the great darkness.

MAIN THOUGHTS

In the two introductory verses (vv.11-12), the apostle writes a general admonition to believers to reveal themselves in this ungodly world as aliens and strangers whose citizenship is in heaven. In the following verses Peter urges them with respect to the various spheres in which they live, to walk in godliness, and to do good works. As a result, the Name of him who has shown compassion on them, and who has grafted them into his own people, will be glorified.

In verses 13-17 the writer tells of their calling with regard to political relationships in which God, in his plan, has placed them.

In verses 18-25 of chapter 2, Peter does the same with respect to social relations. In particular he indicates that their source of power is and must be the example of their Lord and Saviour.

In chapter 3:1-7 Peter deals with family relationships, first with wives (vv. 1-6), and then with husbands (v. 7). Finally, in verses 8-12 the apostle encourages everyone to ensure that the relationships between fellow members in the congregation are characterised by piety and love. However, the background of the letter must not be ignored.

NOTES ON THE TEXT

Chapter 2, verse 11

"Dear friends" or "beloved" is a title which expresses the cordial tie of the shepherd-writer to these sheep-in-the-dispersion.

"Urge" means "to call to". It can also mean "to comfort" (cf. 2 Corinthians 1:4). Peter here addresses them, calling them to a holy walk of life.

For an explanation of "aliens and strangers" see the notes on 1:1 in Outline 2.

"Sinful desires" or "fleshly lusts" [NASB] are the sinful lusts of the flesh, presented here as being at war with "the soul", the inner being of the readers. (For the image of this war, cf. James 4:1ff.) These phrases are used in connection with the sins of heathen life which tempted the believers, and which were revealed particularly in the sins committed with the body (cf. 1 Peter 4:3,4).

Verse 12

This verse is also connected with the "I urge" of verse 11. "Live such good lives" and "keep your behaviour excellent" [NASB] in order that your walk is pure. Their conduct "among the pagans"

must be of such a nature that it contrasts with that of the heathen as white contrasts black. When reading the phrase: "though they accuse you of doing wrong", attention should be drawn to the fact that being a Christian was regarded by the heathens as being dangerous to the welfare of the state. The believers were already distrusted because they did not want to participate in worshipping the emperor. This gave believers even more reason to live blameless lives and to excel in good works in order that their adversaries might be convinced that their judgment was completely wrong.

The "day he visits us" (cf. Luke 19:44: "the time of your visitation") does not necessarily mean the Day of Judgment or the last day. It refers here to the time in which the Lord emphasizes the preaching of the Church with his deeds of blessing or of judgment in order that the call of the Gospel to repentance and faith may be strengthened.

Verse 13

The passive "be subject" as in the RSV is better than the active "submit yourselves" as in the NIV and NASB. Since the attitude of the authorities towards the Christians was of great importance, it was only natural that the apostle dealt with political relationships first. "Authority instituted among men" means "rules regulating human life".

They were to be subject to these laws "for the Lord's sake"; Peter gives the same motive as Paul does in Romans 13. All rulers are servants of God. "Lord" here does not refer to Christ, but to God (see vv.15,16) — see question 1. The Greek indeed has the word for "king", but since it is clearly the intention here to indicate the highest authority in the empire, the word "emperor" [RSV] can be used here as a substitute.

Verse 14

"Governors" refers to subordinate authorities who rule in the name of the emperor — see question 2.

"To punishment" means vengeance in the sense of just retribution.

Compare "commend" to Romans 13:3, the commendation of the rulers. In the states around the Mediterranean Sea, citizens who had done something meritorious for the empire often received "honourable mention" by the state in the form of wreaths, statues, or pillars in a temple or other public building (with their name engraved on it, cf. Revelation 3:12).

Verse 15

The Greek word for "will" indicates the will of God which is made known by way of command.

"Silence" means to "muzzle", to "stop the mouth". "Ignorant" is a lack of insight into a certain matter. In this case it means a lack of the essence of being a Christian. "Foolish" refers to an absence of true discernment.

Verse 16

"Free men" (cf. Matthew 17:26; 1 Corinthians 7:22) are freed from all service of men, kept only for the service of God. This freedom must not be misused as an excuse to commit all sorts of unrighteousness by reasoning that we are free from everything! (cf. 2 Peter 2:13-19) See Outline 2, question 3.

Verse 17

"Everyone" refers to those who have been placed by God in a position of authority. The

"brotherhood" is all the brothers, the congregation of Christ ("congregation" means "gathering", derived from the Greek which indicates the gathering work of Christ).

The word "honour" means to "continue to honour". "The king" includes the emperor as well as all his deputies (cf. Proverbs 24:21) — [see question 4](#).

Verse 18

In this verse the writer applies his admonition to social relationships. He now addresses servants. It is remarkable that masters are not addressed separately here, as in Ephesians 6 and Colossians 4. This is probably because in those days and circumstances, it seldom happened that "masters" broke with heathendom and joined themselves to the Church of Christ since this would mean that they would be virtually expelled from society.

The original text uses a word here for "servants" which is different from the usual one for "slave", a word which indicates a servant who was in the direct service of a family, and as such had a more personal contact with the master. They must act "with all respect", with due obedience because God's hand had placed such a master over them. The Greek does not use the usual word for "masters" (*kurios*) here, but instead a word from which our word "despot" is derived, and which indicates unlimited authority. Those who are "good and considerate" means "those who are kind, just, reasonable", who practice righteousness in their relationship with their servants. "Those who are unreasonable" [NASB], or "harsh" means "those who are twisted, crooked" (the same word as in Acts 2:40, for instance), or those who are capricious and unpredictable.

Verse 19

"Commendable" or "finds favour" [NASB] means that which is pleasing to God, and which he therefore makes his gift.

"Conscience toward God" [NASB] or "mindful of God" [RSV] means being conscious of God's holy presence in the difficulties of everyday life. The Greek says "pain" or "sorrows" [NASB]. Many exegetes think this refers to lashing and ill-treatment. However, the word does not exclude verbal injustice. "Unjust suffering" clearly indicates that these sufferings were undeserved.

Verse 20

"Your credit" refers to "what kind of praise".

"Doing wrong" refer to the misbehaviour of servants towards their masters; for example, in deception, laziness, or disobedience. The Greek word for "receive a beating" is derived from "box on the ear" or "slap on the cheek". When you do something "commendable before God", God looks on you in favour. If you patiently bear the unjust treatment, even the ill-treatment, of your masters with no resentment or hatred, "this is commendable before God".

Verse 21

The strength for this is found in following, not imitating, Christ's example — [see question 5](#). Pay attention to the comparison "suffering though innocent".

"For you" indicates he was our substitute. The Greek word for "example" means "a writing copy" which a student had to copy.

"Steps" are "tracks", like the tracks of the animal a hunter follows in the snow.

Verse 22

(cf. Isaiah 53:9; 2 Corinthians 5:21) "Deceit" translates as insincerity, craftiness, making a statement which is not true.

Verse 23

To understand the meaning of "reviled", compare John 9:28 or Psalm 69:8-13, 21-22. "Christ made no threats", no curses — see question 6.

"Entrusted himself", he trusted God. The Greek verb form indicates a continuous action of leaving everything to God. "Judges righteously" [NASB] and "judges justly" indicate both sides: the positive, in acquittal (after repentance) and the negative, in condemnation (hardened hearts).

Verse 24

"Bore" ("carried and offered up"), is an allusion to the priest who carried the sacrifice up onto the altar. "In his body" refers to Jesus' human nature, which is made one with our sins, although his suffering in the soul is not excluded. Note that an eyewitness speaks these words. "That we might...live" indicates our being made like him in his death and in his resurrection (cf. Romans 6:5-11). Verse 24c is quoted from Isaiah 53:5. The "wounds" were caused by lashes. The original text uses the singular here as a summary of all of Jesus' suffering.

Verse 25

Compare "like sheep going astray" to Isaiah 53:6. This image expresses being lost and in misery (cf. Luke 15:3 ff.).

For "overseer" a word is used from which is derived the word "episcopal" (as in the Episcopalian Church) and from which is formed the word "bishop".

The term "souls" does not refer only to the soul but to the entire person.

Chapter 3. Verses 1, 2

In verses 1-7 Peter draws family relationships into his admonition. "Likewise" [RSV] means "in the same way" [NIV]. Peter maintains the authority of the husband over his wife (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:3; 14:34; Ephesians 5:22; Colossians 3:18), as Paul did. It is a pity that some translations (including the NIV) omit the word "own" in the phrase "your own husbands" [NASB]. Why? The word "own" indicates the reason for this submission. "So that some, though they do not obey" [RSV] is translated better than "so that even if any of them are disobedient" [NASB], because the Greek idiom indicates the reality that there were wives whose husbands were still heathens. Those who are "disobedient to the word" [NASB] are those who do not believe — see question 7. These unbelievers must be "won" without a word or without intentionally testifying of the Gospel, but by the behaviour of believers. They must be "won". They must obey the command to repent and believe.

To "see" is to closely "observe" [NASB], so that one is compelled to reflect and to repent.

"Purity" means here: chaste, free from all sin, not only sin against the seventh commandment.

Verses 3, 4

"Outward adornment" is that which does not belong to the person. The "inner self" or "hidden person of the heart" [NASB] indicates the inner gentle and quiet spirit, which never loses its lustre; it is "imperishable" [NASB] and of "unfading beauty" — see question 8.

Verses 5, 6

"Holy" indicates the noble character of these women. They are set apart for the service of God. Their adornment is not outward, but inward. The source of their submission lies in their hope in God; their lives' meaning and expectations are from the LORD. Sarah is the classic example. After all, she had to follow Abraham, to leave her family and homeland, to exchange her peaceful life for a life of turbulence, wandering, and troubles. By the phrase "called him her master" (cf. Genesis 18:12), it is meant that Sarah confirmed her spoken words in all her deeds. "You are", or better, "you have become" [NASB], means that "it now has become apparent that you are". They must believe "and not give way to fear" ("fluttering alarm", "consternation") because becoming a believer entailed many dangers. Women must not let anything frighten them, but lead quiet and well-balanced lives.

Verse 7

This verse, in which Peter admonishes the husbands, also depends on the "submit yourselves... to every authority instituted among men" of 2:13. The word "submit", however, is not used here, because the husband, as head of the family, is not subject to his wife, even though he will take into account her insight and desires!

To "live", or, to "live together", counts for all of family life. "Considerately" means "with knowledge", with insight into a woman's personality, nature, and "structure" (composition).

The word "vessel" or "partner" probably indicates the position of the wife as "a helper suitable for him" (Genesis 2:18). "Weaker", or "more fragile", is used in connection with the image of earthenware. "Grant her honour" [NASB] means, "assigning, apportioning". The husband must show his wife all the honour due to her on account of her position as "fellow-heir of the grace of life", that grace whose content is life. "May not be hindered" can be translated as "not disrupted".

Verse 8

With the word "finally", Peter concludes his admonition in a general summary. The Greek word for sympathetic means "sympathising" not only in the sorrows of others, but also in the joy of others. The Greek word for "kind-hearted" [NASB] is composed of "bowels", "intestines". Two different words are found in the manuscripts; one means "being kind", the other, "being humble". It appears to me that the first fits the context better.

Verse 9

He who wants to receive God's blessing, must himself bless. "A blessing" here refers to the concrete salvation which God wants to give and which he also works.

Verse 10-12

These verses give Scriptural proof from Psalm 34:12-16.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Does this motive of submitting to human authorities "for the Lord's sake" contradict John's words in the last book of the Bible? According to some exegetes, in the Revelation of John the notion is found that the power of the government, at least that of the godless government, originates with Satan. (However, cf. Revelation 13:2, and also Luke 4:6 and John 12:31.)

2. Did the Saviour himself acknowledge that the authority of civil government was instituted by God (cf. John 19:11)? How is this of importance in connection with Lord's Day 15, Q&A 38, of the Heidelberg Catechism?
3. Which dangerous heretics, who use Christian liberty as a cloak for unrighteousness, does John name (cf. Revelation 2:6; 14; 24)? Does 2 Peter 2 also give us an indication of the beliefs of this heresy?
4. What is the connection between fearing God and honouring rulers (cf. Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 39)?
5. The discussion on verse 21 says we ought to follow Christ rather than imitate him. What is the difference? What thought have countless numbers of people connected with following Christ (in the sense of imitating him)?
6. In light of the discussion on verse 23, consider Matthew 26:64. Is the latter text a threat? Is it possible that Jesus had something else in mind?
7. Is it evident from John 3:36 that to believe means to be obedient (cf. 1 Peter 3:1,2)?
8. May it be deduced from 1 Peter 3:3,4 that Christian women must have disheveled hair and must not be allowed to wear any jewellery, etc.? What directive do we find in regard to feminine dress and appearance for today?

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