

**1<sup>st</sup> Peter 2:11-17**

11 Beloved, I urge you as aliens and exiles to abstain from the desires of the flesh that wage war against the soul. 12 Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honorable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge. 13 For the LORD's sake accept the authority of every human institution, whether of the emperor as supreme, 14 or of governors, as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right. 15 For it is God's will that by doing right you should silence the ignorance of the foolish. 16 As servants of God, live as free people, yet do not use your freedom as a pretext for evil. 17 Honor everyone. Love the family of believers. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

The 1<sup>st</sup> letter of Peter is a pastoral letter to churches that were struggling in a difficult social situation. The members had been active in the life of their communities, but now they are marginalized and abused due to their faith. 1<sup>st</sup> Peter offers some words of encouragement and instruction to the people to live faithfully in spite of the difficult situations brought upon them due to religious discrimination. The letter provides hope. God is the creator. God sent Christ, and the Holy Spirit. God will send Christ again, sometime in the future for justice, and final judgment. Meanwhile, we are to live our lives righteously. We are to obey the teachings of Jesus between his resurrection and his return. Christ was misunderstood and suffered injustice for the sake of others. Christians are called to follow in his steps, to show kindness and respect for others even if there are times when we also suffer injustice. It is biblical instruction to live complacently in unfavorable situations as a testimony to your faith. Righteous behavior follows the example of Christ and it provides an example for others to follow. Your behavior could lead to the conversion of others and may even convert the oppressor.

The Scripture teaches us to live as servants of God. The audience is addressed as aliens and exiles because they are oppressed due to their faith. The instructions are to live righteously and conduct your life honorably. You set the example by doing right with an attitude of humility. As a humble servant you honor everyone even those that abuse you.

The lesson complements other biblical lessons from other New Testament letters, the Old Testament prophets, and Jesus. We grew out of a movement to be the church that Christ built. The American frontier was a society of moral depravity, unbelief, and lawlessness. A divided church is unable to address this problem. What is needed is unity and the one thing that we all can agree upon is Jesus; who Jesus is as well as what Jesus said and did. A united church would be able to address the moral depravity of society. If we could all agree that our theology and practice should be centered on Jesus then we would be the church that Jesus established. The rest is a matter of opinion. All division comes from differences of opinion instead of being focused on Jesus

Christians are urged to live like Christ lived and to live like Christ taught us to live. It is very hard to “love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you” (Luke 6:27-28 NRSV). This is very hard to do. This is probably the sin that is broken more than any other; that and selfish ambition. But if you honestly have Christian humility, then you don't have selfish ambition because your concern is for others not the self.

The burning questions for all of us are: am I living my life according to Christ? If not, what am I going to do about it? When you make a mistake, it's the exception, not the rule. In that case, we repent and live honorably as best we can in all circumstances. This letter was sent to Christians that were suffering. The Bible tells us to remain faithful and honorable even in unfavorable circumstances. This behavior is our testimony. When people see that you are an honorable person, this glorifies God. Your example of faith is for the Lord's sake. If you suffer for righteousness then God will reward you.

One challenge facing Jesus was how to reveal the truth to the people when it was beyond the people's realm of understanding. It was those that thought they were right that provided the strongest resistance to Jesus. The people that could easily relate to him were the poor, outcast, sick, and hurting. The appeal of Jesus to these people continues today as we are encouraged to always keep the faith, even in the face of suffering. This lesson is hard and the teachings of Jesus are hard. We can't be perfect; never have and never will. But that's why God gives us grace.