

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 5/16/93

I Peter 2:11-17 "How to Be a Model Citizen in a Messy World"

**Intro:**

I am an optimist. But it is disheartening to see the rampant moral decay occurring all around us. I receive mail all the time from para-church and social action groups. They remind me what you and I already know. God's authority is under attack in our society.

Illust:

As I talk with Christians, I find many wrestling with a perplexing question...

Q: How can we live as model citizens in a messy world?

That's the question God's Word addresses for us in I Peter 2.

**Proposition: If we are going to live as model citizens in this world, there are 2 key responsibilities we must accept, according to I Peter 2:11-17.**

I. Being a Model Citizen involves Separation (11-12).

A. Avoid sin (11).

B. Advertise the Savior (12).

II. Being a Model Citizen involves Submission (13-17).

A. Ingredient #1: Responsibility (13)

B. Ingredient #2: Rank (14)

C. Ingredient #3: Reason (15-16)

D. Ingredient #4: Relationships (17)

1. With people in the World

2. With people in the Church

3. With God

4. With Civil Authorities

The Big Picture of I Peter

Theme: "How to be a Christian in a Non-Christian World"

Peter addresses that issue as follows. He helps us get a grip on these themes...

Ch 1--Redemption 1:3

Ch 2--Responsibilities 2:11

Ch 3--Relationships a. Family (1-7) b. Church (8ff)

Ch 4--Reproach 4:14

Ch 5--Risk 5:8

This morning, we arrive at a new section in Peter's letter. Beginning in 2:11, Peter addresses the issue of how to live the Christian life. We move from WHAT to HOW. Doctrine leads to duty. Peter gets down to the nuts and bolts of Christianity. Issues like how to relate to civil authorities (2:13-17), and how to live for Christ on your job (2:18-25), and how to honor Christ in your marriage relationship (3:1-7), and how to maintain healthy relationships in the church (3:8ff).

Observation: The American church has done a poor job when it comes to teaching people HOW to live the Christian life. We've tended to go to extremes. On the one hand, some churches take the hands off approach, which says, "It's not our business to tell you how to live. That's personal." On the other hand, there's the legalistic approach, which boils Christianity down to a set of rules--"Do these five things, and don't do these 6 things, and you'll be a good Christian."

But you know what? God designed the church to be a training ground. I'm amazed at how much the Bible has to say about HOW to live the Christian life. We need to be taught. Here's the question today...

Q: How can we be model citizens in a messy world? Our first responsibility...

### **I. Being a Model Citizen involves Separation (11-12).**

Vv 11-12 "Dearly beloved..."

What is separation? Separation is a greatly misunderstood word. In secular circles we hear the cry, "Separation of church and state." In Christian contexts, we'll hear the charge at times, "The problem with the church today is a lack of separation!"

What is separation? Biblical separation starts with a clear understanding of our Identity. How does Peter refer to his Christian readers?

"dearly beloved"--has to do with our relationship to God and to one another

"as sojourners and pilgrims"--has to do with our relation to the world (1:1, 17)

If you are a Christian, you are special to God, and special to one another. As a church, we are united in a family relationship. We don't have those special ties with the world. We are sojourners. Like Abraham, we're temporary residents in this world. We must constantly remind ourselves of who we are.

If we are to be model citizens, we need to get a handle on separation.

Q: What's involved in biblical separation? Separation is a two-sided coin. We have two obligations, one negative, the other positive.

#### A. Avoid sin (11).

V 11 "abstain from fleshly lusts..."

We are to avoid sin. Peter begged his readers to "abstain." The word "abstain" means "to hold back, to keep away, to be distant." It's a present tense verb indicating it's a continuing obligation. We are in an on-going battle. Here's Peter's charge, "Christian, make a conscious effort to abstain, to hold back, to keep away, to be distant." From what?

"fleshly lusts which war against your soul"

Q: What are "fleshly lusts"?

When Peter says "flesh," he does not mean "body." He's not saying the body is evil. That type of thinking that says the body is evil and the spirit is good has been around since Plato. That's dualism, and is not taught in the Bible. The desires of the body are not evil in and of themselves.

What are fleshly lusts? Peter says they are the things that war against our souls. Fleshly lusts are the ambitions that keep us from living as sojourners.

The great evangelist D.L. Moody once said, "I have more trouble with D.L. Moody than with any man I know." Our real battle is not with people around us, but with passions within us (Wiersbe).

James 4:1 "From where come wars and fightings among you? Come they not here, even of your lusts that war in your members?"

Every day you make dozens of choices. And so do I. Most of the choices are subtle. What song to listen to on the radio. What magazine to pick up in the Dr.'s office. Whether to spend the evening playing a round of golf or at home with the family. And so on. Each choice we make reflects our value system.

Listen. If we are going to please our Lord, we have to learn to say "NO" to sin. We must avoid sin. Illust:

Tran: But there's another side to the coin of separation. Our first obligation is to avoid sin.

#### B. Advertise the Savior (12).

V 12 "Having your behavior honest..."

NIV "Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day He visits us."

Q: How do we advertise the Savior?

A: Peter says we do it by our conduct. The KJV uses the word "conversation" but the Greek word is broader. It has to do with our lifestyle.

Listen. Conduct is critical. In fact, the literal, Greek word order is translated, "Your conduct among the Gentiles having good."

Separation means we must avoid sin. It also means we must advertise the Savior. If you'll look carefully at v 12, you'll see that the Christians in Peter's day were under attack. By the non-Christian world. They endured a verbal abuse.

What kind of charges were fired at early Christians? Well since our Christian ancestors refused to worship the Roman Emperor, they were often accused of being unloyal to the state or Caesar. Also since they didn't have idols in their homes like the rest of the pagan Romans, they were slandered as being atheists. And it didn't go over too well that they didn't participate in the wild, religious festivals with their Roman neighbors.

So the early Christians got a lot of bad press. They were accused of being "evildoers." The attacks were groundless.

Listen. Criticism is part of life. If we are serious about living for Christ, people will criticize us. But we can silence criticism by doing good.

Peter says, "Just live the Christian life. Let the world see your good works."

Illust: I agree with a statement I heard Howard Hendricks make, noted teacher at Dallas Seminary for 40 years, "I'd like to think my best teaching takes place in the classroom. It doesn't."

Friends, people learn about Christianity by watching our lives. And they watch us like a hawk.

Illust: I remember vividly an experience in the 7th grade. I hadn't been a Christian too long. I had learned it was important to pause and thank God for the food before I ate. One day at school, I was with my buddies. It was lunch time. We went to the cafeteria. We were talking as we found our seat. The guys started eating while we were talking. Buddy stopped talking, looked at me, and said, "I'll stop talking so you can go ahead and pray and eat."

People watch us! Even if we're not aware. The question is...

Q: What do they see? Are we advertising the Savior with our lives?

The world doesn't understand Christianity. Unsaved men can't comprehend the things of God. They couldn't in Peter's day. They can't in ours. They'll criticise. They'll slander. But Peter's point is this. Don't give the world legitimate grounds to malign the name of Christ.

eg--Business owners, "I could cut this corner and make big bucks."

eg--Teens, "Man, everybody will be at the party."

Ask yourself, "If I do it, will it help or harm the cause of Christ?"

Application: Our goal is not to be popular. Our goal is not to get good press releases about us. Our goal is to advertise our Savior.

Notice the impact a positive testimony can have...

V 12 "that they may...glorify God in the day of visitation"

Q: What is the Day of Visitation? Two possibilities:

1. God's Judgment Day
2. The Day when God visits lost sinners and saves them.

Listen. Separation involves 2 obligations. We must avoid sin. And we must advertise the Savior with our lives.

Illust: Story about Indians in 1805 (Wiersbe)

Tran: How can we be model citizens in a messy world? First, it involves separation.

## **II. Being a Model Citizen involves Submission (13-17).**

Look carefully at the first word of v 13.

V 13 "Submit"

With that word, Peter introduces a whole new section in his letter. The word "submit" has received a lot of bad press. That's unfortunate. In the NT, outside of the word "love," this is one of the key words used to depict our responsibility in Christian relationships. All Christians are to practice submissive living (Eph 5:21).

Q: What's involved in submission, especially when it comes to citizenship?

### A. Ingredient #1: Responsibility (13)

V 13 "Submit yourselves to every ordinance FOR THE LORD'S SAKE"

We have a responsibility. Every Christian does. We are responsible, for the Lord's sake, to maintain proper relationships. With whom?

Scan Peter's "submission section":

1. Christian Citizens are to submit (2:13-17).
  2. Christian Slaves are to submit (2:18-25).
  3. Christian Wives are to submit (3:1-7).
  4. Christian Husbands are to submit (3:8).
  5. All Church members are to submit to o.a. (3:9).
- (see: Eph 5:21ff Paul's submission section)

The first ingredient of submission is Responsibility. If I am a Christian, I am responsible to submit. It's a command. To whom must I submit?

#### B. Ingredient #2: Rank (14)

V 13 "Submit yourselves to every ordinance..."

The word "submit" means simply "to place or rank under". It has nothing to do with worth or value. It has to do with function. I Cor 15:28 says the Son of God is in submission to the God the Father.

God alone possesses absolute authority in the universe. Yet there are 3 institutions in the world that possess delegated authority. God has ordained and given authority to: the Home (Gen 1:27), the Church (Mt 16), and Human Government.

Rom 13:1 "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers...ordained of God."

God ordained human government. Peter mentions "King" and "governors."

Q: What's the role of gov't, according to God's design?

1. To punish those who do wrong
2. To commend those that do right

When you think about it, when a government punishes those who do wrong, and commends those who do right, you have a healthy society. But when a government begins to commend those who do wrong, and punish those who do right, the culture corrupts.

Observation: God does not endorse any one form of government. Christianity can prosper under communism as well as in a democratic nation (take China today for example). The Roman gov't in Peter's day was full of corruption. But Peter didn't tell his readers to riot and overthrow the Emperor. He said, "Submit."

Q: You say, "Why submit to civil authorities, especially if they are corrupt?"

V 13 "for the Lord's sake"

Objection: "But wait. Is there ever a time when we should not submit?"

Yes. When allegiance to the government would violate our allegiance to the Lord. Remember, God's authority is the only ultimate authority. Government possesses delegated authority. As long as the government (or home) functions within the limits of its God-given authority, we are to submit to them. But...If it usurps

authority, and goes beyond the bounds, the Christian not only can resist, but has the moral responsibility to do so.

Illust: Acts 4--The authorities told Peter to stop preaching the gospel (18). How did Peter respond? Vv 18-19 "Whether it is right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than to God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak..."

Illust: Foxe's Book of Martyrs tells many horrid accounts of Christians who were commanded to worship the Roman Emperor. They refused, and were brutally murdered. Did they do the right thing? It's always right to obey God rather than man.

Caution: Sometimes Christians rationalize this.

Illust: I was at a Christian bookstore a couple of weeks ago. I charged my purchase to the church account. I asked the clerk, "Should we withhold sales tax?" He said, "Don't worry about it. The gov't gets more than it's share anyway. They stick their hand where it doesn't belong."

Peter says we are to submit to the civil authorities. Why?

### C. Ingredient #3: Reason (15-16)

Vv 15-16 "For so is the will of God"

Listen. Peter says it makes no difference whether we agree with the politics and practices of a government official. We must respect the office even if we can't respect the man or woman in the office. Why? It's the will of God.

And there's another reason...

V 15 "that with well-doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men"

If you are a Christian, you ought to be a model citizen in your community. So should I. We should obey the law. Not because we're afraid of getting caught. But because it's the will of God. And Peter says when Christians behave as model citizens, they "put to silence" ("muzzle") the critics of Christianity.

Q: What if someone says, "I don't have to obey man's law. I obey God's."?

V 16 "As free, not using your liberty for a cloak..."

Q: Do you know the people who are really free in life?

It's not those who parade down Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington. It's not those who endorse indiscriminate, carefree, unbridled, passionate living.

Key: The way to experience true freedom is to willingly submit to God and become His servant.

Quote: Seneca said, "No one is free who is the slave of his body. Liberty consists in obeying God." Cicero said, "We are servants of the laws that we may be able to be free." Plutarch insisted that every bad man is a slave (Barclay).

Submission involves Responsibility, Rank, a Reason, and...

### D. Ingredient #4: Relationships (17)

V 17 is a summary statement of a Christian's relationships. Peter sums up how God expects us to relate to four groups. These 4, brief commands sum up the life of a model Christian citizen.

*1. With people in the World*

V 17 "Honor all men" = to fix the value or price to; to respect

*2. With people in the Church*

V 17 "Love the brotherhood"

*3. With God*

V 17 "Fear God"

Listen. A person will never truly respect people until he learns to fear God.

*4. With Civil Authorities*

V 17 "Honor the king."

**Conclusion:**

How can we be model citizens in a messy world? Being a model citizen involves Separation, and Submission.