

A New People for an Old Message: A Study in 1 Peter, 2:13-25 Preached @ Harambee Church by Pastor Michael Gunn on May 17th, 2009

“Despite their guilt as Christians and the ruthless punishment it deserved, the victims were pitied. For it was felt that they were being sacrificed to one man’s brutality rather than to the national interest.”

Tacitus

On the killing of Christians at the hand of Nero after the burning of Rome

Intro

God never promises us that things on this earth are going to be ok. We are just called to love, honor and live just lives. In our passage today we are going to see some verses that I think fly in the face of most Christian ideas in regards to politics.

From the Head...

Recap: It seems now that Peter in our passage (**1 Peter 2:13-25**) is beginning to work out **verses 11-12**. Here we are told to *“Abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul,”* and to *“Keep your conduct among the gentiles honorable...”* so *“they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.”* We saw that this is the result of our new identity in Christ (**1 Peter 2:9**), and a new motivation based on the incredible things that Christ has done for us (**1 Peter 2:9b-10**). Any other motivation to act on God’s behalf will only end in burn out or pride.

The Command

(1 Peter 2:13-20)

Here we have an interesting command of Peter’s; to be in subjection to government authorities for the Lord’s sake. This is similar to Paul’s writing in **Romans 13**, and Jesus’ command in **Matthew 22:21** (*“To render to Caesar what is Caesar’s”).* Verses like this have been the object of much speculation and pondering on the Christian’s role in things like human government.

1. Be Subject Government Authorities For God’s Sake (vv. 13-15)

“Be Subject...”

What are we supposed to do with a command like this; especially when the government is unjust? The Caesar in control at the time of this writing is most likely Nero, a grossly immoral ruler, who was alleged for starting a horrible fire in Rome and then blamed it on the Christians causing the persecution and subsequent brutal deaths of many Roman Christians. Is Peter asking believer’s to be doormats for evil rulers? Most likely he is not. One thing to note is Peter’s use of the word *“Basileus”* (King) instead of *Princeps* (First one/Ruler, Emperor). Some see this as a subversive passage, in that Peter is actually making fun of the authorities, but in this context, it appears to be saying that in spite of the personal lives of the rulers, we are to be in submission to these men for two reasons that Peter mentions; **One**, because God has ordained the rulers to protect and serve the people (**v. 14**, cf. **2:12; 3:1**), and **secondly**, because it is God’s will, *“That by doing good you should put to silence the ignorant foolish people”* (**v. 15**). Peter isn’t condoning their behavior, but he is calling believer’s to a higher calling. When the commands of the state supercedes the Lord’s commands, it appears right to disobey (**Exodus 1:17; Daniel 3:3:13-18; Acts 4:18-20; Hebrews 11:23**).

The Christian movement was a subversive one. They got themselves into trouble in Rome by claiming that “Jesus Is Lord!” It was an incredibly subversive statement. Peter’s command is not for us to turn our back on injustice, but to sacrifice ourselves for the sake of the gospel in the state. I believe that even his use of “Basileus” is to show that he was not enslaved to the powers of this world, but was free from them entirely (See **v. 16**), but that freedom’s energy was to be used for the good of humanity, even if that meant the death of the believer. Because we

“...by doing Good”

This isn’t defined and it’s a bit dangerous to start filling in the blanks here, but context does give us some idea. First the “Good” helps others glorify God (See **v. 12**). Since this is in the context of the society (Government) it is quite possible that the “Good” refers to social engagement. In *Seeking the Welfare of the City*, Bruce Winter says that it may have to do with the large donations Christians made to the good of the city in the form of *“Benefactions.”* Benefactions were donations put aside to help the social conditions or beautify the conditions of the city. The idea is help build the community for the sake of the community, rather than seeking their own welfare.

2. Love and Honor All and Fear God (v. 17)

This is a summary statement, reminding believers to live a life of peace, giving honor to all, and loving one another, while fearing the only person that can destroy the body and the soul, not men, who cannot do anything of any real consequence, since their identity was now in Christ.

3. Be Subject to Employers (vv. 18-20)

This is speaking of “Servants,” but servants (*Oiketai*) here are quite different than the horrific institution that we witnessed in our US history. This type of servant was often a way to become a “Free” citizen of the Roman Empire, and did not usually carry with it a destitute existence. Many of these “Servants” chose to be servants because it was a way to have a “Good” life, albeit in the servile employment of someone else (In reality this isn’t as far from many of our own existence).

The Motivation

(1 Peter 2:21-25)

As we often see in the NT it isn’t so much what you do, but why you do it. While the religious are motivated by gaining acceptance from God so that they can be blessed, the gospel compels us to recognize that in Christ, we are truly loved and accepted by God, so therefore we obey out of a desire to glorify God and lift up His name and make much of Him. Our motivation is more important than the subsequent actions. Doing religious actions (Going to church, praying, repenting, etc.) are done by all religious people, but the difference lies in the reason for them. If you are doing these actions to gain something other than Jesus, you are doing them for yourself. Reformer Martin Luther rightfully wrote, “*The default mechanism of the human heart is to go back to the religious approach.*” Our “Default Mechanism” is our self centered desire to make things right for us, but in doing so, we ironically don’t find the very thing we desire (Joy, Happiness). This is why the religious struggle when trials happen. Because they have doing religious works to appease God, they feel slighted by God and become angry, or they feel they haven’t done enough making themselves guilty and depressed.

When Paul wants to discuss the Corinthians greed and lack of giving, he does so by showing them the poverty of Jesus on their behalf (2 Corinthians 8:9). In our passage Peter also turns to Christ who “*Suffered for you.*” The fact is all of our sin and most of our negative emotions stem from a disbelief in the gospel (See 2 Peter 1:8, 9). When we do not believe that we are rich in Christ, we will try and find our riches somewhere else. When we do not believe we are loved and forgiven in Christ, we will fail to love and forgive others. The reason we can “Submit” to government entities at our own expense, is the belief in the truth that our reward is Jesus, and we can sacrifice ourselves for the sake of those that don’t know Jesus (2 Timothy 2:10).

...to the Heart

The issues of the heart are hard. We are sinful and our sin is evident in our attitudes toward one another, and our lack of desire to sacrifice to help someone else. We are often “Stuck” in our ways, and no longer to even attempt to deal with our hardened hearts. We feel justified in our greed, bitterness and anger. We aren’t willing to submit to anyone or anything, because we feel they have slighted us, or they don’t “Measure Up” to our standards before we do. This isn’t what Jesus is calling us to. He is calling us to submit no matter what they have done to us, because our submission is to Him, as He submitted to His father in spite of people’s reaction to Him. When we get this, we can submit instead of that deep desire to prove ourselves and gain revenge. Peter is going to continue to hammer us throughout the rest of this book, reminding us that in Christ, we can submit to one another for the sake of the gospel, even when it hurts!!

To interact with this sermon go to www.sermonrant.wordpress.com