

Living Hope Part Five: 1 Peter 2:11-25

I. Dear Friends

"Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. 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."

– 1 Peter 2:11-12

Wherever we are ministering we work together as *co-labourers* in the Gospel, and from a place of friendship – of seeing each other as "beloved" (*agapetos*).

II. Foreigners and Exiles (Again)

This is like a manual for missional living – for living the Jesus-Way so that we can be fruitful in announcing the Jesus-News.

To the extent you see *this country* as your true home, that is the extent to which you will have to say, "Jesus, your mission, and the 'true country' doesn't matter to me." The purpose of Peter's "foreigner identity language" is aimed to "free us up" for mission. To loosen the stronghold on our lives if we believe we are settlers not travellers.

What shape does this take?

1. Negatively: "...*abstain from* sinful desires, which wage war against your soul."

Most, maybe even *all* of these desires can be linked back to good desire God gives. And yet these can all be bent. Warped. Twisted. A Christian understanding of sin is not that everything about us is totally depraved beyond recognition – that there is no goodness and beauty in us at all. No. But it does say that there is not a part of us that is not, in some way, touched by this selfish impulse.

And we need to, by God's grace, bring these into check – submit them to God's redeeming work.

2. Positively: "Live such good lives..."

Sometimes people who have mistreated us will come to see our good deeds in this life. But often times they won't. So, this is a call to patience – a fruit of the Spirit. We are called to live such good lives – treating our neighbours so well – that their accusations of us will have no place to land.

III. Submitting, *For the Lord's Sake*, to Every Human Authority

“Submit yourselves, for the Lord’s sake, to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God’s will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people.

- 1 Peter 2:13-15

“This whole section is in direct antithesis of the spirit of the world, where every individual and group demand its ‘rights’ and understands liberty as freedom from responsibility”

– Edmond Clowney

Christians were viewed, in the ancient world, as dangerous to the social order. They had stepped away from taking part in many of the practices that were seen as maintaining social cohesion in their time.

Peter reminds these ‘missionary communities’ that they need to be especially careful to show that they were living for the good of their society, not against it.

The same principle applies today: how we respond to the governing authorities, by living in a way that is lawful, and contributes to the flourishing of society – paying our taxes...honestly; being exemplary citizens by seeking the good of our city and country – these keep the Christian faith from being seen as disruptive. This keeps people from having reason to doubt the goodness of the gospel message.

IV. True Freedom and Rightly Aimed ‘Fear’

“Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God’s slaves. Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor.”

– 1 Peter 2:16-17

Freedom doesn’t mean, “No limits”. That’s a naïve view. Freedom means “I must choose to limit myself in the right ways.”

We “live as free people” by being ‘God’s slave’.” We will live in service to something or someone. Something or someone will be the drive and motive for what we do.

And these will control you and me. And so, it’s only in “fearing God” that we are truly free to love others.

To “fear God”, in this sense is to say, “I care more about what God thinks of me, and what I do, than what anyone else thinks. I want to be a ‘God-pleaser’ rather than a ‘people-pleaser’.”

V. Learning to “Trace the Lines”

¹⁸ Slaves, in reverent fear of God submit yourselves to your masters, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. ¹⁹ For it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God. ²⁰ But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God.”

– 1 Peter 2:18-20

Slavery was, unfortunately, part and parcel of the ancient world. The Gospel, and the resultant Christian view of the world, will pave the way for the end to slavery. But Peter is writing in this context and what he’s saying, again, it’s ultimately about bringing glory to God.

“[T]hey [slaves] submit to others because God is their Master, and this is God’s desire. They behave as they do, not because of the intrinsic authority of the other human being but to silence the criticism of unbelievers through doing what is right”

- Peter Davids

“But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. ²¹ To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

²² “He committed no sin,
and no deceit was found in his mouth.”

²³ When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. (20b-23)

²⁴ “He himself bore our sins” in his body on the cross, **so that [there is the ‘why’ again. So that]** we might die to sins and live for righteousness; “by his wounds you have been healed.” ²⁵ For “you were like sheep going astray,” but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.” – 1 Peter 2:20a-25

When Peter writes about how Jesus is “leaving you an example”, the word he uses is different than most places that are translated “example” in the NT. He uses this word - *hupogrammos*. That last part “*grammos*” is where we get our word “grammar” from.

That word is used elsewhere in the ancient world of the process of teaching children to write. It’s the lines to be traced by a child learning to form the letters, or the ‘outlines’ of a sketch which the artist fills in.

“Jesus’ suffering is not simply an example of pattern or model, as if one of many; he is *the* paradigm by which Christians write the letters of his gospel in their lives.”

- Karen Jobes

How do we trace these lines – when everything inside of us says, ‘make them pay’? Where do we find the motivation and the power to live like that?

Gospel-Rooted Power for New Life

Right in the middle of this appeal to follow the example of Christ – to live for God’s glory by submitting to authorities and suffering unjustly – is this incredible picture. Jesus: The Just One, subjected to injustice. Jesus, the Whole One, broken apart to ‘heal us.’

So, the appeal to follow the pattern of Jesus, to adopt his non-retaliation, forgiving, trusting-God-with-this-unjust-treatment, is based on the reality that we ourselves have needed forgiving. And that we have been healed by Jesus’ own dying.

This text reminds us that the heart of the Gospel is forgiveness. The heart of God for us is to give us a fresh start. And that also means that we turn that same forgiving, fresh start, I-won’t-make-you-pay kind of life toward those who have hurt us too.

Where do you need to ‘trace the lines’ that Jesus has drawn out for you? In which relationship are you struggling to adopt the non-retaliation ethic?

The civil rights leader, John Perkins, describes his awful treatment from police after a non-violent protest. He then recalls:

“But...it wasn’t just the pity or deep sickness I saw alone that pushed me past hatred. It was also the fact that *I* was broken.... There is something built into all of us that makes us want to be superior... So, I can’t hate the white man. It’s a spiritual problem – black or white, we all need to be born again...”

- John Perkins, *A Quiet Revolution*

Life Group Discussion and Reflection Questions

Open Up

Why does injustice make us angry? What are some of the typical responses we see in our world when people are treated unfairly?

Read 1 Peter 2:11-25

1. As a group, summarize the main emphasis of the passage. What are the key ideas that Peter is trying to communicate?
2. Why do you think Peter address his audience as “foreigners and exiles” again at this point in his letter? Why do we need to keep reminding ourselves of this aspect of our identity?
3. What are the negative and positive commands of vv.11-12? Why do you personally, and us corporately as a church, need to hear these? In what ways do these remain vital for our witness to the world?
4. Peter is writing to a community in a very different political situation than our own. There is an emperor; we have democratically elected officials. Even still, why are the commands of vv.13-17 so vital for the witness of the church today? In what ways do you personally need to hear these commands again?
5. Pastor Dave spoke of following the example of Jesus, noting that the word Peter choses in Greek (*hupogrammos*) means to “trace the lines” – how children were taught to write letters. What do we need to know if we will be able to “trace the lines” – to follow in Jesus’ own footsteps with regards to how he responds to unjust treatment toward himself? (Focus too on vv.24-25).
6. In what situation do you most need to hear and embrace what Peter says here about responding with a non-retaliation ethic?
7. There is a ‘learning’ process for ‘tracing the lines’; practices that form us into those who can, more and more ‘naturally’ act according to the kingdom way of life. Biblical scholar, Nijah Gupta says:

“We [as Christians who are ‘foreigners and exiles’] have to know our own constitution, which is Scriptures.... What ideas and language are so deep in us that it is really coming through in what we say and do. And the amount of reading the Bible people do is pretty low compared to watching... [TV shows]. The Scriptures have to be so ingrained in us that we can call to mind the Beatitudes, or key texts from Revelation 2 or 3, or the Psalms. We have to know the

Scriptures so well that when we hit those forks in the road, and we think “I’m too busy. That’s your problem not mine”, then we call to mind the Lord’s Prayer.” - Nijah Gupta

- A. Reflect on Gupta’s encouragement. Why does having regular Bible reading matter so much for faithful living?
- B. In what ways do you need to further develop your own Bible reading habits?

Prayer

Take some time to thank Jesus for his self-sacrifice for us. Pray for the needs of your group, in particular, that we would be empowered to ‘trace the lines’ so that we live the same paradigm as Jesus.