

Exegesis of 1 Peter 2:11-25

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Our section, 2:11-25, is part of a larger section of the epistle that begins at this point, 2:11-3:12 (or to 3:17), in which Peter exhorts the people of God (2:10) to lead a patient, God pleasing life in this world in their various situations as citizens of an earthly government (2:13-17); servants, or slaves (2:18-25); wives (3:1-6) and husbands (3:7), with a final series of exhortations to all in general (3:8-12 or 17).

These specific exhortations are prefaced by a beautiful, two-fold general exhortation, vv. 11,12:

(v.11) Beloved, I exhort you, as sojourners and strangers, to abstain from carnal desires, such as wage war against the soul, (v.12) keeping your conduct excellent among the heathen, so that in that (very respect) in which they are speaking against you as of evildoers, they may, closely observing (your conduct and claims) as a result of your excellent deeds, give glory to God in the day of visitation.

Lexical and Grammatical Notes:

paroikos: a sojourner, a new inhabitant; one who lives in a city without the right of citizenship.

parepidemos: an immigrant, stranger, guest; one newly arrived or present with others in a foreign country.

apechestrai: pres. middle inf.

sarkikos: fleshly, belonging to, determined by or with the characteristics of the sarx (here, sinful sarx).

epithumia: an eager desire, passionate desire.

strateuomai: to be a soldier, to wage war.

he psyche: the life principle, life, soul, self, animal life, life without any psychological content.

anastrophe: behavior, conduct, manner of life.

echontes: should be in the acc. case, since it is in apposition to the subject of the in. apechesthai; nominative no doubt to stress the equal importance of the positive part of the exhortation.

hina...doxasoin: purpose clause.

en ho: for en touto, en ho.

kalos, e, on: beautiful, morally beautiful, good, excellent.

epopteuo: to behold, inspect, closely observe; used of those entering the highest stage in greek mysteries. The object of epopteuontes must be supplied from the context. episkope: a visit, inspection; oversight, supervision; visitation (for good or evil).

Beloved, Peter addresses his readers. They are truly beloved of God, who has "called them out of darkness into His marvelous light." They are God's people, by grace; they have obtained mercy. The fact that we are the undeserving objects of God's free, faithful, saving love with all that it implies, is the most powerful and most basic motivation for us to do His will, to live for Him. Peter exhorts us as people who are "sojourners and strangers" in this world. Gods people should always bear in mind, as did the patriarchs of old, that "here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come" (Heb. 13:14), that we are only passing through this world, en route to and in hope of a "better country" (Heb. 11:16). The expression Peter uses, paroikous kai parepidemous, occurs in the LXX translation of Ps. 39:12, which Peter undoubtedly had in mind: "for I am a stranger with Thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were." (Cf. also Lev. 25:23). Now, a stranger who is only passing through a country, a sojourner who is only temporarily residing in a country, and has no intention of remaining there, will generally try to avoid personal involvement in the internal affairs of that country, while at the same time he will take special care to conduct himself in an honest and law-abiding way as a representative of another land. This is precisely what Peter urges us to do. As sojourners and strangers in this world, he

encourages us "to abstain from carnal desires" while "keeping our conduct excellent among the heathen" of this world. The Christian sojourner is still living "en sarki" (4:2), and the flesh is still corrupt and sinful, as yesterday's Epistle Lesson reminded us (Gal. 5:17-21), and constantly attempting to reassert itself by suggesting all manner of sinful desires for our thoughts to dwell on. We should not be deceived into thinking that we can safely indulge in a few "harmless" carnal desires. Abstain, Peter says: we should not even dwell upon them in our thoughts when they arise out of our sinful flesh, much less even think of bringing them to fruition. There is no such thing as a "harmless" carnal desire (Jas. 1:14,15). They "wage war against the soul." The "psyche" of the Christian, his soul as the essence of his person and life, belongs to God through Christ. It is under the control of the Holy Spirit, who is the down-payment of the eternal life in store for it (Eph. 1:14). The flesh, which is mortified and crucified under this arrangement is constantly trying to regain control over the soul, and it attempts to do this by waging a continuous war on the soul, continuously assaulting and barraging it with carnal desires. Thus, "the flesh lusteth against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh" (Gal. 5:17). The Christian sojourner should realize the great danger to his soul and, under the guidance of the Spirit, refuse to have anything to do with the sinful desires of his flesh as they assault him. He should realize that, to give in to them, is to deny that he is dead to sin, that he is led by the Spirit, that he is a stranger and sojourner in this world, - is to yield himself a servant to sin (Rom. 6:16) and to risk losing his soul eternally. (Cf. Luther, in Stöckh., p. 106).

But Peter's exhortation also has a positive side. To the "apechomai" there is a corresponding "echo." As sojourners and strangers, we should also be "keeping our conduct excellent among the heathen." Our conduct should be "kale," literally, beautiful, i.e., morally beautiful. Peter uses the adjective "kalos" instead of "agathos" because he wants to stress especially the impression that our behavior makes on "ta ethne," the Gentiles, that is, the unbelieving Gentiles, the heathen. Our conduct, our whole behavior, should give them the impression of something beautiful, excellent, beyond reproach. The motivation for keeping such excellent conduct among the heathen is not that we wish to display our own moral superiority, of course, but "that...they might glorify God." How this happens, Peter explains in the modifying clauses before and after "doxasosin ton theon." "En ho" can hardly mean "whereas" or "while." More likely, it is short for "en touto, en ho," and expresses that which, ultimately, will cause the heathen to praise God - the same thing which, incidentally, now causes them to slander, to accuse the Christians, calling them evildoers. We should keep our conduct excellent among the heathen, "so that, in that (very thing) in which they are accusing (us) of being evildoers...they might glorify God" - namely, in the fact that we are Christians! "True Christians have always been considered by the heathen, by unbelievers, to be a stubborn, separatistic, proud, haughty, humanity-hating bunch, that doesn't belong in this world... Their Christianity itself is held against them as an evil deeds" (Stöeckhardt, p. 107). Christ predicted that this would happen to His disciples, "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake" (Matt. 5:11). It is not the conduct of Christians that draws such slanderous accusations, it is their confession of Christ, which is an offense to the world.

But how shall the heathen, who now are accusing us of being evildoers because we are Christians, come around to giving glory to God because of our Christianity? By our excellent conduct. They cannot help but notice it. And "as a result of (our) excellent deeds," (ek ton kalon ergon), they are led to "closely examine," (episkopes), Christianity (object supplied from the context). The result is that they "give glory to God in the day of (their) visitation," (en hemera episkopes), that is, when God visits them with His salvation, when He brings them to faith through the Gospel. Episkeptesthai is the equivalent of the Hebrew paqad, "to visit" either for good or for evil. The context must decide whether the "day of visitation" is a visitation in judgment (i.e., Judgment Day) or in grace, as episkeptesthai is used in Acts 15:14 - "Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit (episkepsato) the Gentiles to take out of them a people for Himself" (cf. also Job 10:12).

Thus, our excellent conduct among the Gentiles can lead those who now are speaking evil of us because of our faith in Christi someday to take a closer look at the claims of Christianity as a result of our excellent deeds; and the result may well be, as they reconsider the Gospel, that God will graciously illuminate their darkened hearts with the light of the Gospel of His Son, and in that day of His gracious visitation, they will glorify God for that for which they once spoke evil of us. Our excellent conduct and deeds are not the means of

grace or conversion, but God can and does use the excellent behavior of His Christians to predispose men to pay closer attention to the saving Gospel to which the Christians testify. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16). Stöckhardt writes:

When his (the individual heathen's) day (of visitation), when his hour has come, God lets some rays of His wonderful light, of which the words and works of Christians testify, fall into his benighted soul, reveals to him His grace in Christ, and so wins his heart, so that he turns to Him and praises and acknowledges Him as his Lord and God. So it is a high and holy duty that Christians have to fulfill with regard to the children and citizens of this world, with whom they live as guests.

There is no need here for extraordinary or violent conversion attempts. Let Christians simply confess their God and Christ whenever the opportunity presents itself, let them keep themselves unspotted from the world and let them faithfully and conscientiously carry out their earthly calling. God will, in His time, give power to this, their sermon in confession and life, in the heart of first one, then another of their heathen fellow travelers through life, and thus will tear yet many a soul away from earthly things and win it for heaven. (P. 109).

A sojourner and stranger in a foreign country, although his wholehearted allegiance is to another country and another ruler, must still obey the laws and to a certain extent also the customs of the country in which he is temporarily residing. The Christian as a sojourner and stranger must do the same in this world, even though, as a citizen of heaven and as a redeemed child of God, he enjoys perfect liberty and recognizes none other than God as his Lord. With this in mind, Peter now explains what the "excellent conduct" of the Christian consists in with regard to the society in which he lives:

(v.13) Submit yourselves to every human institution for the Lord's sake, (v.14) whether to the king, as supreme, or to governors, as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the approbation of those that do well (v.15) (because this is the will of God, that by doing good you should muzzle the ignorance of foolish men), (v.16) as free men, and not using liberty as a pretext to wickedness; but as God's servants. (v.17) Honor all; love the brotherhood; fear God; honor the king.

Lexical and Grammatical Notes:

hypotasso: submit, subject. The passive voice has a middle meaning.

anthropinos, ine, on: human, of or for humans, proper to humans.

ktisis: construction, institution, arrangements; creation (always has God as subject in N.T.).

hegomon: one who governs by authority another.

ekdikesis: defense, vindication; punishment.

epainon: praise, approbation.

phimoo: tie shut, muzzle, put to silence.

epikalumna: a lid, a cover; pretext.

kakia: evil, wickedness, "badness."

Verse 13 is first of all a general exhortation concerning the Christian's relation to the governmental structure of the society he lives in. God's people should submit themselves "to every anthropine ktisei for the Lord's sake." Since ktizein and its derivatives occur elsewhere in the N.T. only with reference to divine order and creation, the meaning here must be, as Stöckhardt states: "all ordinances and institutions instituted by God for men, for human society," (p.110). Peter is, in effect, saying what Paul says, Rom. 13:1 - "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God." We

should be subject, we should submit, "for the Lord's sake," that is, for Christ's sake. To do the opposite would dishonor His name among us.

Our obedience or submission should not be selective. "Every human ordinance" means every structure of authority that God has given among and for men, without exception, "whether to the king (the Roman emperor), as supreme, or to governors, as -sent by him..." The Roman emperor was not only the highest power in the Roman empire in apostolic days, he claimed to be the only power. All other sub-rulers, governors, proconsuls, procurators, kings, etc., derived their authority directly from him. Their power was Ceasar's power. Note that the human institutions to which we are to submit in verse 13 turn out to be human beings themselves in verse 14, men to whom the Christians of Peter's day might with good reason have been reluctant to submit: an emperor such as the infamous Nero, procurators like Pontius Pilate, puppet kings like the bloody Herods. This is usually the case, even today. But the Christian should remember that he is not submitting to the man, but to the office he represents, to the institution ordained of God, for the benefit of men.

Peter also clearly defines the limits of the authority of human institutions: the hegemones are sent "for the punishment of evildoers and the approbation of those that do well." This is the purpose for which God ordains human government, and He carries out this purpose, no matter how evil or corrupt the men are through whom he does it. The punishment of evildoers, the sword of the state, deters the gross outbreak of crime and violence and thus helps create a favorable climate in which Gods people can lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this reason alone, Christians should be ready to submit to every human ordinance for the Lord's sake. However, when the human authorities demand obedience to a law or decree which clearly contradicts God's will, we must be ready to say with Peter: "We ought to obey God rather than men," (Acts 5:29). "The approbation of those that do well" by the human government is usually of a rather general nature, more implied than actually expressed; it does occasionally happen that an individual is singled out and publicly praised for his justitia civilis.

Verse 15 seems to fit best into the context as a parenthesis, in which Peter states why God's people should submit to and obey every human institution: "(because this is the will of God, that by doing good you should muzzle the ignorance of foolish men)." The early Christians were often maligned by their unbelieving Gentile compatriots as rebels, enemies of the state and a threat to society (Stöckhardt, p. 113). One of the popular lies that apparently was circulating about the Christians was that their philosophy was: "Let us do evil, that good may come" (Rom. 3:8). The misunderstood doctrine of justification by faith without the deeds of the law no doubt gave rise to the idea that Christianity was a real danger to public morals. These charges were the result of ignorance of the true nature of Christianity. Such false charges emanating from the ignorance of foolish men are still thrown at Christians today. Unbelievers cannot see the faith in our hearts, nor can they truly understand the genuine works of faith and love that a Christian does. But they can understand civic righteousness, and they are impressed by it. And when they see our submission to government in all things and our conscientious obedience of the laws of the state, they are "muzzled," their mouth is forced shut, and they can no longer spread false accusations and lies about Christianity. Conversely, if we do not conscientiously submit to every human institution, if we play fast and loose with the laws of the government, even if we consider them unimportant laws, we are providing just the opportunity the enemies of Christ are looking for to malign and slander Christianity by our example.

Does this mean, then, that we must consider ourselves slavishly bound under the authority and decrees of human government? No, Peter says, our submission to human institutions is not to be slavish, but rather "as free men, and not using freedom (liberty) as a pretext (literally: as a cover) for wickedness; but as God's servants." "Not in spite of the fact that they are free, but because they are free, Christians should obey the authorities" (Stöckh., p. 113). Christians are indeed free. "All things are your's," Paul writes to the Corinthians, "whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's" (1 Cor. 3:21-23). Our redemption in Christ Jesus has lifted us above all in this present world by making us heirs of eternal life. We are now already sitting in heavenly places in Christ Jesus! But this freedom is not a freedom to sin, and the Christian who would "use liberty for an occasion to the flesh" (Gal. 5:3) or as a cover for wickedness of any sort does not know true liberty, for true

freedom exercises itself willingly in the service of God and delights in carrying out His will. "Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness," Paul says (Rom. 6:18).

Peter concludes this section with four brief, related exhortations which shed light on the Christian's proper social and political relationships in this world. "Honor all; love the brotherhood; fear God; honor the king." Being a member of God's chosen people should not give the Christian a superior or condescending attitude over against his fellowman. He should "honor all men," as fellow creatures of God and souls for whom Christ died no less than for himself. We Christians must beware of the danger of despising our fellowmen who are not as fortunate as we. If we remember that we are saved by grace alone, it will not be difficult for us to genuinely respect all men, from the lowest to the greatest. Yet, we cannot help but feel differently toward those who share with us the hope of eternal life through faith in Christ; and properly so. "Love the brotherhood," Peter says, the brotherhood of Christ, that is. "Everyone that loveth Him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of Him" (1 John 5:1). We should cultivate this love for our fellow believers. "Fear God; honor the king." Just as our relationship to our fellowman is put in its proper perspective by the reminder to love the brotherhood, so the honor that is due the king, the supreme human authority in the land, is qualified by the attitude that a Christian can only have, properly, toward God. We are first of all the people of God, then citizens of the world and of such and such a king or government.

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