

A Word About Christ and Country

For some time in our nation there has been a need to give justice to gay and transgendered people in their rights as citizens: hospital visitation rights, inheritance rights, and some others; however, the United States Supreme Court, on June 26, announced a broad sweeping decision that takes our nation way beyond mere civil rights for all its citizens. The Court judged that all states must allow for same sex marriage. Not only does this judgment assume a new definition of marriage, contrary to the Bible, but, as the four dissenting judges made clear, this ruling eliminates the proper procedure through popular referenda and legislative action for our nation to draw conclusions on this matter. What then shall the believer do? We can shrilly oppose these actions and fight them at every point; we can simply “join the party” with many of our fellow citizens; we can “move to Australia” and try to avoid the whole issue; but the apostle Peter, in his instructions to the little churches in Asia Minor in the oppressive Roman Empire, had other guidance for us. Let’s study our text together:

1 Peter 2:11-17, 21-25

11 Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. **12** Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

Submission to Authority

13 Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, **14** or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. **15** For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. **16** Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. **17** Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

21 For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. **22** He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. **23** When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. **24** He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. **25** For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

Peter gives us outstanding instructions.

I. Remember who you are (v. 11a)

We are “sojourners and exiles.” Our citizenship in this country or any other country is a “secondary citizenship,” while our first citizenship is in the Kingdom of God. This perspective changes everything. We are not grasping for all of our privileges and all of our joy in life through our citizenship of this country but, rather, we are looking for the new Jerusalem, in which every desire will be satisfied.

II. We must not cave in (v. 11b)

We must abstain from the very “passions of the flesh” which our current society is condoning. Peter reminds us that we are to be different, regardless of the popular behaviors of the surrounding culture.

III. We must walk the walk (v. 12)

We must joyfully set forth the beauty of the Christian lifestyle in every respect, including our sexual ethic. Regardless of what the world may say to us, we shall continue to set forth the way of Christ in every aspect of our lives.

IV. We must look for God's judgment (v. 12b)

We display before a floundering world good deeds that will cause them to glorify God "on the day of visitation." There's coming a day of final judgment for which we live. Daniel, whose name means "God is my judge," stood faithfully for the word of God, even though all of those in Babylon were living a contrary lifestyle. We, as parents, can take great comfort in the fact that Daniel was reared well and when he was separated from his parents and family, he stood faithfully for the word of God. We can trust God to work in our children in this generation as well.

V. We must submit to God-ordained authorities (vv. 13-16)

If we are commanded by civil authorities to do something that God forbids or if we are forbidden by civil authorities to do something God commands, we must, of course, disobey the civil authorities. There are several examples of this in the Scriptures. Otherwise, however, says Peter, we must obey the civil authorities. Remember that Peter wrote this during the reign of Nero! Even though we disagree at times with the rulings of judges and magistrates and the opinions of presidents and governors, when our own conscience is not being violated, we submit to our governing authorities.

VI. We must honor everyone (v. 17)

In Justice Kennedy's majority opinion, he used the word "dignity" nine times. Obviously, this is a huge issue for the LGBT community. Let it not be said that the Church of Jesus Christ has withheld honor and dignity from any of our neighbors. Even while we disagree with much of the sexual immorality about us, we must continue to dignify and honor everyone around us.

VII. We must look to Jesus (vv. 21-25)

We look to Jesus first of all as our example (vv. 21-23). Everything that Peter teaches in this text, Jesus did. We must walk in His steps. Secondly, we look to Jesus as our Savior (vv. 24-25). Jesus lived this kind of life in order to save us, and we have no right to withhold the beautiful and powerful Gospel message from anyone around us regardless of their ethical conduct.

Discussion Questions

1. What do you think about the SCOTUS decision on 6/26/15 regarding same sex marriage? Why?
2. How does our status as "sojourners and exiles" affect our response to the SCOTUS decision? (Cf: verse 11)
3. Why is it important that we abstain from the passions of the flesh and conduct ourselves in an honorable manner? (Cf: vv. 11-12).
4. Under what circumstances must we disobey civil authorities? Why must we, in all other circumstances, submit to them? (Cf: vv. 13-16)

5. What does it mean for us today, in these circumstances, to “honor everyone”? (Cf: v. 17)

6. What is our ultimate motivation for our conduct in a fallen world? (Cf: vv. 21-25)

Going Deeper

1. What, for you, is the most difficult aspect of Peter’s instructions for Christians in a fallen world?

2. What can you do to grow in your obedience to these instructions?