

Dear Friends,

We owe a profound debt to our founding fathers for designing a government around a system of checks and balances that, if respected, prevents any one branch of government to become too strong or despotic. However, no form of government is exempt from the Biblical teaching that believers in Christ are to respect and submit to civil government, not because they regard it as deserving, but because the Lord instituted civil government and commands us to honor it as God's institution. Nothing in Scripture teaches believers to respect "Blue" but not "Red," or to respect "Red" but not "Blue." Nor does Scripture teach that God providentially always intervenes to ensure that His favorite political interest or personality wins an election. From our next door neighbor to the most powerful political figure in the country, Peter's lesson reminds us to "Honor" civil authorities, our employer, as well as the "brotherhood" of believers. As children of God, we belong to the family of God. We are not an "Only child." We are part of a large and blessed family, and Scripture teaches us to live respectfully and "Honorably" toward them.

We need Peter's reminder today. We need it so very much.

Lord bless,  
Joe Holder

## **Inevitable Suffering in Faith—How to React**

**Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king. Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward. For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. (1 Peter 2:17-20 KJV 1900)**

We might pose the logical question. Does Verse 17 identify with the prior lesson on believers' disposition toward civil government, or does it belong to the lesson that follows regarding servants? From the perspective of Christian ethics, the debate is needless. The principles apply in both areas of the Christian life.

**Honour all men...Honour the king.** Scripture writers often put word or logical parentheses around a lesson or thought. We might reasonably reflect on the various people in our lives. While Peter requires that we "Honour" them all, he doesn't necessarily require the same precise disposition or respect toward each person. Different people grow different relationships with us, relationships that wisely—and Biblically—require varying degrees of "Honour." What Peter emphatically prohibits in this lesson is that we take upon ourselves to judge others by dishonoring them. We cannot "Honour all men" and hold any particular person in contempt because of their skin color, their dialect, their political philosophy, or any of the endless rationalizations people adopt to justify their contempt for someone else.

In the context of this verse, Peter has taught us to respect and submit to civil government. If we apply this instruction to civil government, we might "Honor" various government officials in proportion to their position in the government. Let me give you an example. Several years ago, a preacher in a different region

of our country told me about a traffic stop he recently experienced. He was driving well above the posted speed limit, so he knew, when he saw the flashing lights behind him, why he was being stopped. He stopped on the side of the road, got out his driver's license, vehicle registration, and proof of insurance, ready to cooperate with the officer. When the officer stepped up to his window, he handed the officer the papers, and initiated a conversation. "Officer, I'm a pastor, and I want you to know that I pray daily for you and for all the officers who work to keep the population safe." The officer thanked him for his prayers, but he still wrote my friend a deserved ticket for speeding. How often do we pray for the police officers in our neighborhood or community? We can debate the various issues and people at the national political level as much as we wish. However, most of us shall never see or meet even one of these people. In contrast, we might well need and meet those local police, fire, or emergency people. Peter teaches us to honor all officials, but we are liable to turn the degree of emotional investment upside down compared to reality. We may be inclined to focus all our emotional energy on national leaders whom we shall never meet (And who often promise much to Christians, but forget them once elected) to the neglect of praying for the local officials whom we need regularly.

Paul teaches us to pray for all civil governments and officials with a simple and non-political objective.

**I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour.** (1 Timothy 2:1-3 KJV)

Underscore Paul's stated objective for our prayers, "**that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.**" He didn't write a word about praying for one candidate to win over another or one party to defeat the other. We need the next point in Paul's teaching even more. "**For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour.**" Praying with Paul's stated purpose is a prayer the Lord approves. Can you imagine a better way to honor anyone than to pray for them, sincerely pray for the Lord to guide and bless them? If this kind of prayer is "good and acceptable" to the Lord, I wonder how He reacts when we over-invest our emotions and efforts in promoting one or another political cause or personality that promises Christians what they want to hear, but forgets they exist after they are elected.

James warns us against showing false respect toward someone because of their wealth or social status. (James 2:1-9 KJV) If we show partiality toward someone because of these reasons, are we not thereby dishonoring others whom we look down on because they do not enjoy that social or financial status? This lesson says more about authentic Christian conduct than we might first imagine.

**Love the brotherhood.** Love in Scripture refers far more to conduct than to emotion. If we love others in the Lord's family, we act out a loving grace toward them, not merely think nice thoughts about them. Jesus taught this principle when He said, "**If ye love me, keep my commandments.**" (John 14:15 KJV) Jesus associated His kind of love to conduct, to keeping His commandments. Peter affirms Jesus' teaching. Let's take this instruction a bit deeper into the trenches of our daily conduct. Peter didn't teach us to love the Christians who agree with us, who believe as we do only. An effective New Testament evangelism must include both a faithful New Testament gospel and New Testament love toward the people whom we hope to influence toward Jesus and His faith-way. Authentic Christian conduct may be fully as effective as sound and gracious Bible doctrinal teaching. If we meet someone whose persona leads us to believe they have been born again, they are part of the Lord's "Brotherhood," and Peter teaches us to show love toward them.

**Fear God.** I find it instructive that Peter blended this teaching into a list of instructions regarding how we are to regard various classes of people. I occasionally hear people describe how they put someone down because they regarded that person as undeserving of their respect. If God commands us to honor all men and to love the brotherhood, shouldn't we obey based on His command, regardless of the person's merit? "Merit based" Christianity contradicts the fundamental premise of New Testament Christianity. The New Testament teaches us to frame our faith, and our faith-life, around grace.

**Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.** (Colossians 4:6 KJV)

Grace, not merit, should govern our speech, along with our actions toward others, especially other believers.

What is the fear of God? Admittedly, this is a challenging thought. There should be no question that the idea includes a profound sense of respect toward God. However, Scripture also includes a reminder of the profound greatness and justice of our God. **"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."** (Hebrews 10:31 KJV) I "Fear" that far too many contemporary Christians hold a low regard of God that has no concept of fear in either sense of the Bible concept. We too often regard God as our "Best buddy," who loves us too much to chasten us. How did John react when he saw the glorified Jesus?

**And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last.** (Revelation 1:17 KJV)

You and I would react the same as John if we were to see Jesus as John saw Him. We can't imagine the fear that flooded over John that he fell at Jesus' feet as dead. For good reason, Jesus' first words to John were **"Fear not."** The Christian faith of today would be more vigorous and healthy if believers sensed the true greatness of our God and responded appropriately, fearfully, to Him.

**Honour the king.** When Peter wrote these words, the Roman Empire controlled most of the Mediterranean region. Caesar was the "King," and appointed Roman governors ruled local provinces. No, Peter in no way taught his readers to embrace all the immoral ideas and practices of Roman nobility. The point is rather that believers in Christ are taught to respect civil government, regardless its form or the conduct its leaders indulge. Jesus taught the same principle when He spoke the words, "And Jesus answering said unto them, **Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.** And they marvelled at him." (Mark 12:17 KJV) No civil ruler should ever be blindly followed, almost God-like in the minds of his/her followers. Our God remains "...a jealous God." (Exodus 20:5, 34:14 KJV) He warned His Old Testament people of severe judgment should they provoke Him to "Jealousy." God's jealousy is not selfish, but rather intended to protect His people against themselves and their/our inclination to idolatry.

Our country provides a unique ability for citizens to vote for competing parties and personalities for governmental leadership. Sadly often, Christians become mesmerized by either personalities or ideas and

cast their vote far more because of political party affiliation or winsome personality than Biblical principles. A Biblical minded believer will consider a candidate's moral character more than his or her political affiliation. And, when a person's preferred party or candidate loses the election, "Honour the king" applies and requires us to honor the civil authorities who, despite our preference, were elected to govern the country. We fail this Biblical teaching when we engage in caustic rhetoric against politicians from "That other party" or perspective. Peter didn't teach that we are exempt from his teaching to honor the king because we disagree with the person or party in power. Nor did Jesus. If Christian people would quietly vote New Testament moral principles, they would have a powerful impact on government, a good impact. But, alas, few indeed think of such a thing. They become mesmerized by publicity and "Spin" lines, along with unbelievers. We can't be the Lord's light while imitating darkness.

**Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward. For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God.** The equivalent of "Servants" in the first century relates to employees in our culture. When you read this and similar passages in the New Testament, think in terms of applying its teachings to your employment. Yes, Peter even applies this teaching to "froward" employers, as well as good and gentle employers. During my business career, I experienced both kinds. I confess that applying Peter's teachings to my attitude and conduct when I worked for a froward employer was difficult.

In this setting, a "Froward" employer would be dishonest or generally wicked. On one occasion, I quietly left what had been a near ideal position because I became aware that my superiors were acting dishonestly. Eventually their schemes would have impacted me, so I chose to leave. In another case, an otherwise good employer invited me to go with him on a mini-vacation. However, because of his description of his time away, I knew that he would ask me to join him in conduct that would violate my values, I declined. When he insisted, I told him that my vacation time was rare, so any vacation I took would be with Sandra. He never asked me again. I was blessed in both examples to avoid prolonged abuse.

Peter's writings are part of God's inspired Book, so we are to take them seriously and work to apply them to our lives. In this case, we are instructed to apply them to our employment. The wise instruction reminds us to respond to life tensions based on a tender and active conscience toward God. Potential promotion or increased salary are not to be any part of our response. We answer to our Lord for every moment, including our employment time.

What would change in our lives if we made all our decisions based on what is, according to Scripture (Book, chapter, and verse), thank-worthy to the Lord? Let's apply this mindset and discover for ourselves.

Elder Joe Holder