

Sermon – 1 PETER 2:11-25, Leroy Coote 21st February 2021

There is a saying, “When the rubber hits the road”. This saying refers to when one’s efforts are put to the test or put into practice. In the case of our passage today, what we see is not only that the rubber should hit the road but how the rubber is to hit the road and in what situation. This means that what we see in the context of 1 Peter today is how the theology that has been spelt out from 1 Peter 1:1 – 2:10 is to apply in the context that the recipients of the letter are placed.

Given the similarity of the context of 1 Peter to the 21st February 2021, we will discover why 1 Peter is not only a letter for our time but also how we are to apply in our time as well. It will also answer the following questions from the earlier sections of the letter:

- How do we live out the gift of salvation that God has given us?
- How do we live out the holy lives God called us to because He has saved us? And...
- How do we live as a royal priesthood?

I’m going to look at this passage under four headings:

- *The goal of living holy lives.*
- *Living holy lives in general society.*
- *Living holy lives in the workplace and...*
- *Why we are to live these holy lives. This could also apply to being a royal priesthood – a people belonging to God – in the context that the royal priesthood is placed in.*

By the end of today, what will be made clear is how we are to live as people who have been saved by God in the world today.

1. Let us look at the goal of living holy lives which is spelt out in verses 11 and 12.

Peter spells out the status of the people he is writing to by telling them that they are foreigners and aliens. The implication behind this is that the people he is writing to are in a land where the customs that they are encountering are not consistent with what their true home would be. Implied in these comments, is the fact that as God’s people, they have been given guidelines to live by.

The first one of these is found in verse 11 and it says, “*to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul.*” This is a practical application of Holy living that has yet to be mentioned until now. In essence, Peter is urging the people he is writing to, to stay with the plan that he has for them which from Chapter 1 is all about living holy lives as a response to what God has done for them through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

But there is another reason that Peter provides for abstaining from sinful desires...and that is *which wage war against your soul*. Why do sinful desires wage war against the soul of the believer? It is because the practice of sin and holy living according to God’s words are diametrically opposed to each other just like north and South, good and bad and east and west. This is the battle that believers face because sin is the natural direction of the human being whereas following Christ goes against the natural grain of the human being. What does this say about holy living? Well, apart from being not easy, it says that holy living involves a multitude of intentional acts that a believer does in order to express their thanks to God for what he has done for us and to show that we are a royal priesthood.

However, there is another reason to abstain from sinful desires and these are found in verse 12 which reads, *“¹² 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.”* The reason is that believers in Christ are to live such good lives that they may see your good deeds. In his book “Surprise the world”, Michael Frost calls this, ‘living questionable lives’. By questionable lives, he means lives that people ask questions about.

He describes them this way, *“If all believers are leading the kinds of lives that evoke questions from their friends, then opportunities for sharing faith abound.”* (Surprise the world – page 5). Living questionable lives is similar to what Peter is talking about in this passage and he hopes by the people doing this that they may see the good deeds of God’s people who are trying to live by God’s standards. But also, as a result of seeing God’s people live godly lives, the pagans or non-believers in Christ may end up being transformed and also live godly lives.

This also should be the goal of each and every believer of God’s church – to live such holy lives with the help of the sanctification of the Holy Spirit that other people’s lives are transformed so that those who didn’t follow God previously, follow him now or as Wayne Grudem puts it in his commentary, “Christians living in an unbelieving society must avoid sinful desires and continually maintain exemplary patterns of life, so that unbelievers will be saved and God glorified.” That is the challenge for the church as we know it in the 21st century and beyond – in other words – us.

2. In light of this, how does this apply to living life in general society?

We do this by submitting to human authority for the Lord’s sake and this is found throughout verses 13-17. This passage starts with these words from verses 13 and 14, *“¹³ Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, ¹⁴ or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right.”* We are called to submit to the powers that be. Whether we agree with the laws that they put into our land, we are to submit to them. This is part of God’s call on our lives as Christians. The challenge for believers in Christ is to submit to the laws of the land. This is something we have had to do as a church for the last year given the COVID-19 scenario. We are still under some of the restrictions and could be for a further period of time.

However, the goal of our submission to the authorities is not just purely submit to God – it is to display holy living. The effect of holy living is found in verse 15. According to this, holy living is described as doing good which in the context of 1 Peter means doing good in the eyes of God. But the purpose of doing good, according to this verse, is to silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. This verse bears some explanation. In the context that the people that Peter is writing to, there is much foolish talk against the Christians present in their land. The foundation of this foolish talk is based on minimal or zero understanding of Christianity. The goal then of doing good God’s way in terms of obedience to the authorities, is to silence the talk of these foolish and ignorant people. Therefore, law-abiding conduct is what will silence these people at this point. For us, as God’s people, law abiding conduct will bring blessing as it pleases God. However, whilst living as God’s people obedient to the laws of the land. We are called to live as free people. This doesn’t mean to do what we feel like doing but it means that we are free to do God’s will in accordance with his word.

This is spelt out in verse 16 and it means to live as God’s slaves. By living as God’s slave, we are obedient to God our master and follow Him in heart, in obedience to God’s word and living our lives in accordance with the word of God. What does this look like specifically? Listen to what it says in verse 17, *“¹⁷ Show **proper respect** to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honour the*

emperor.” The danger of a verse like this is taking it out of context. Why? Because it can read as moral behaviour with no base meaning that its application can apply anyway you think. However, given that the theme of this book is holy living in response to what God has done for us in saving us through the death of his Son, it means that we are to show proper respect God’s way. What does that look like in practice? In effect, it means that we treat people the way God wants to treat them.

Equally, exactly the same, loving them God’s way regardless of who they are and what they do. But it goes deeper into loving the family of believers being in awe of God and to honour the emperor. In other word, this whole section is about being obedient to the laws of the land God’s way and behaving in the world the way God wants us to – to the point that the lives of the Christian point people towards a relationship with God as that is the goal of holy living in society in general. This means that Christian living is visible in action and not hidden under a bushel.

3. However, that is not the only place the Christian is to live life God’s way. There is also the context of slavery which in our 21st Century context is the workplace.

Again, submission is involved but this time it is to the master of the slave which is mentioned in verse 18. However, the submission to one’s master is to be done the same way you submit to God. The reason for this is to show the distinctive life of the Christian and hopefully through godly action cause the master and those in society to know who God is by real Christianity in life. Our actions speak louder than our words and are the point of difference to those who watch the life of the Christian. However, Peter says that is not easy because there will be suffering especially from the harsh masters mentioned in verse 18. And it is commendable to suffer if you are doing good, not doing the wrong thing. This is not about being a masochist and seeking to suffer but it is about unjust treatment from a master even though you are being obedient to God and the master. As tough as it may be in the context you find yourself in work wise, God calls you to keep being obedient to your boss the way God wants you to.

Why? Because that is good and honourable to God and that’s what holy living God’s way is all about. But why do we put up with that in order to live holy lives?

4. Because that is what Jesus put up with for us.

We find what Jesus put up with for our salvation in verses 21-25. As believers in Christ, we are called to this. We may not like it but God calls us to this. This suffering is what we put up with because Christ suffered for us on the cross in order to save us. Because Christ suffered for us, he left us an example in order to follow in his footsteps. What this passage is telling us is that there will be suffering in following Christ.

But as we look at the life of Christ in verses 22-24, there is something significant that is described. That is living a holy life because of what God has done for you will lead to some sort of suffering and Jesus is the example here. He lived a life of holiness.

Look at verses 22 and 23, 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.”* The depth of his holiness is connected to the way he responds to his persecutors – with no response to them. In other words, he kept doing what God wanted him to do which is exactly what we should do in whatever circumstances we find ourselves in. Verse 23 spells this out with his lack of retaliation and his lack of threats when there was suffering. But also trusted himself into God’s hands – the one who judges justly.

The result for us was he himself bore our sins on the cross so that we might die to sin and live for righteousness. And by his wounds on the cross, we have been healed. What has been healed is our relationship with God because Christ took the punishment for all sin, when, in reality, it should have been us on the cross. This shows the mercy of God in enormous depth because he sacrificed his Son for our sin so that we could be clean in his eyes and then He raised Jesus to life so that we could be in relationship with Him. What an awesome God we are called to be holy for!

He did this because we were like sheep who had gone astray and now through what God has done for us, we have been returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. Therefore, because Christ has chosen us, modelled holy living, suffered for following God and is now our Shepherd and overseer – how do we respond? We respond by modelling the Christian faith out of gratitude to God for what he has done for us. We do this by abstaining from sinful desires. We do this by living lives in submission to the laws of the land or by holiness in action. We do this by living lives in submission to our masters and doing our best God's way to serve these masters whether they are good or bad. We live holy lives in the context of suffering as Christ did and pointing people towards a relationship with God as that is what true holiness does. And that my friends, is how the rubber hits the roads in terms of holy living as desired by God.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, let us live holy lives that are so dynamic that they point people to Jesus as that is the desire of Peter in this letter.