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## Wise Counsel for Christian Citizens

### Above Politics and Parliaments, Part 2

*1 Peter 2:16-17*

### Discussion Guide

#### Main Idea:

Despite all the change in our culture, God's Word endures and instructs us on how to live as citizens of our nation while honoring our commitments as citizens of heaven.

#### Discussion Points:

1 Peter 2:16-17 contains seven specific principles regarding how believers are to live as citizens of God's kingdom while still here on earth.

- 1) Remember that you are free from the condemnation, judgment and all the eternal penalties of sin.
  - In what ways would freedom in Christ equip and encourage a believer who was being persecuted or unjustly deprived of freedoms?
  - How important is political or social freedom in fulfilling God's mission for your life?
- 2) Your freedom in Christ does not give you license to live however you please.
  - Are there areas in which you tend to abuse your freedom in Christ and take advantage of the grace God had shown you? What are those areas?
  - What is the relationship between restraining our freedoms and maintaining our witness?
- 3) The purpose of your freedom is that Christ will be your Master.
  - In this message Stephen made this point: "Everyone is a slave to whatever it is that demands from them their highest allegiance. The question is not, are you a slave? The question is, whose slave are you?" What is your honest answer to that question? Are there areas of your life that you have not yielded to Christ?
  - What steps can you take today to live according to the demands of your true Master, Jesus Christ?
- 4) No matter what, show respect for everyone.
  - Are there specific people, or categories of people that you find it difficult to respect? How does that typically manifest itself in your actions and attitudes?
  - What would change in your relationships toward people if you consciously approached the relationship with the mindset that "this is someone made in God's image"?

## **Discussion Guide cont.**

5) Don't forget to love the church deeply.

- Do you find that sometimes loving those in your church family is harder than loving unbelievers? If so, why do you think that is?
- Can you think of times in your church when members failed to love each other deeply? What impact did that have on the church? How was the situation resolved?
- What are some other passages of Scripture that speak to the importance of Christians showing love to one another?

6) Live in awe of God.

- How do you define the fear of God? What does that phrase mean?
- Stephen gave three characteristics of what the fear of God looks like in the life of a believer: hunger to read God's Word; desire to apply the truth of God's Word and confidence in God's Word. Over the last seven days, how well have you done in living these characteristics? Where are you struggling? What steps can you take in the next seven days to better live out these characteristics?

7) Show respect to those in authority, no matter who it is.

- What happens when a believer disagrees with those in authority? Is it possible to express disagreement and still obey God's command to respect authority? How can we do that?
- What are the implications to the fact that your governing authorities are appointed by God to accomplish whatever God wants to accomplish?

### **Gospel Connection:**

When God saves us, we become citizens of a new kingdom. We remain on earth as ambassadors of that kingdom, and we live in such a way so as to point people to the reality of the gospel. The gospel changes the way we live and think, and that change is reflected in our relationship to all people, including our governing authorities.

### **Practical Implications:**

**Think:** It's not easy living as dual citizens – citizens of an earthly nation and citizens of heaven. We need to change our thinking to remember that our heavenly citizenship dictates how we live now. We need to filter the prevailing attitudes of our culture through the lens of God's Word, and allow our relationships to be conformed to Scripture.

**Pray:** Confess the times when you have not respected others, when you have abused your freedom in Christ or when you have disrespected authority in your speech or attitudes. Ask God to help you live as a citizen of His kingdom.

**Respond:** Review the seven principles identified in this passage. Identify one or two that you need to work on, and take steps this week to reflect your heavenly citizenship in your earthly relationships.

# Wise Counsel for Christian Citizens

## Above Politics and Parliaments, Part 2

*1 Peter 2:16-17*

Some time ago, someone in our congregation sent me a list of things called, “The Perks of Getting Older.”

I’m not sure why – maybe they were feeling old . . . for the record, I’m not . . . at any rate – here are some of the perks of getting older:

- People call you at 9 pm and ask apologetically, “Did I wake you?”
- When you get on an elevator, you can sing along with the music because you know all the words
- You no longer think of speed limits as a personal challenge.
  - I don’t know about that one!
- Here’s a good one: your secrets are safe with your friends because they won’t remember them either.

One anonymous author put growing older in these very practical terms when he wrote: life is like a roll of toilet paper . . . the closer you get to the end, the faster it goes.

The truth is, it’s one thing to get older . . . and for life to get faster; it’s another thing to live more wisely.

Author and evangelical scholar, Robert Alden wrote; since 1955 sheer factual knowledge has doubled every five years. Our generation possesses more data about the universe and human personality than all previous generations put together. Think of it this way: high school graduates today have been exposed to more information about the world than Plato, Aristotle, and the [Apostles] combined. In terms of technical facts alone, neither Aristotle nor the Apostle [Peter] would be able to pass a college entrance exam today.” Imagine, Alden wrote this in 1983.<sup>i</sup>

A recent report from the Education Secretary informed us that by the year 2,000, technical knowledge was doubling every 2 years; and now, get this, technical knowledge is doubling every 72 hours.

One author put it this way: we are now preparing college students to hold jobs that haven’t been

created, using technologies that haven’t been invented in order to create solutions for problems that do not yet exist. How do you get ready for that kind of world?

One of the amazing things about inspired scripture is the fact that God provides instruction for us regarding the real issues of life that never go out of date.

While technologies change; while cultures and countries change; while political leaders and governments and nations rise and fall; God’s word not only endures, but continues to equip you in the 21<sup>st</sup> century with as much relevance and wisdom as His word equipped the believers living in the 1<sup>st</sup> century.

And one of the issues the early believers were dealing with had to do with how to respond to their role as citizens of Rome, while at the same time living faithfully as citizens of heaven.

Their government and culture around them was turning hostile and difficult. Slander and misrepresentation and marginalization of Christians was becoming all the rage.

How were they to respond and live - wisely? We’re asking the same thing today, like never before.

How does the Christian respond in a culture where the American Civil Liberties Union and the Americans for the Separation of Church and State join the chorus of so many others where they have successfully educated a generation of Americans to believe that freedom *of* religion actually means freedom *from* religion; freedom from any kind of religious influence. Your religious beliefs need to be kept at home and then by all means kept quiet. So prayer is banished at city council meetings and football games; references to God in valedictorian speeches aren’t allowed; and copies of the Ten Commandments need to come down from courtroom walls.<sup>ii</sup>

How do you live in a generation that is desperately attempting to erase any mention of a Creator God – and His inspired word.

I've often been grateful that verses of scripture and acknowledgments of God have been chiseled into the stonework of many of our national monuments . . . I'm glad they've literally been carved in stone . . . but then again, they can be sandblasted away in the future.

The question remains – how do you respond to a culture like that? 1<sup>st</sup> century Christians and 21<sup>st</sup> century Christians want to know!

The Apostle Peter is in the process of delivering the answer in chapter 2 of his inspired letter.

And it's a rather surprising answer – and much needed today.

It begins at **1 Peter chapter 2** – I invite you to turn there again. Peter writes in **verse 13, *Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority 14. Or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right*** (that's the job description from God for government – punishing evil living and praising right living) **15. *For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men.***

In other words, live with the attitude of submission to just law in such a way that the slanders against you which include treason and sedition and an uncaring attitude toward those around you, will be silenced – literally, the yapping and biting and snarling of foolish accusers may just be muzzled.

That was the subject of our last study. Now for today, Peter delivers even more rapid-fire instructions for wise living in a politically charged climate –in fact, what I want to do is separate them into 7 different instructions:

**1. The first one is simply this: no matter how it feels, you're actually free!**

Notice, **verse 16** – it begins by telling us to ***act as free men.***

In other words, no matter how restrictive or repressive the government or the culture may be where you've been assigned by God to live and serve, don't ever forget – you're actually the one who is truly free.

Think about it; you've been freed from condemnation and judgment and all the eternal penalties of sin –

- *you have been freed from sin (Romans 6:18);*
- *for He (Christ) rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins (Colossians 1:13)*
- *if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed (John 8:36).*

You're the one who's free! And the bonds you might wear are made of plastic and they will soon be replaced with the glory of who you really are and where you truly belong.

**2. Secondly, never use your freedom to run wild**

Notice again **verse 16. *Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil.***

The word Peter uses for **covering** relates to a veil or a covering thrown over something that someone is trying to conceal.<sup>iii</sup>

It also carries the idea of a mask. In other words, don't conceal your sin behind the mask of Christian liberty. Don't veil your sin behind the religious jargon of Christian freedom. There is perhaps no other doctrine is as easy to pervert and twist and misinterpret as that of Christian freedom.<sup>iv</sup> Which is why Peter seems so quick to add this caution.

The Apostle Paul did the same when he wrote to the Galatians and warned them not to use their liberty as an occasion for the flesh (**Galatians 5:13**). Peter will warn the believers in his second letter about the fact that people who are promising others liberty are actually enslaved to corruption (**2 Peter 2:19**).

Being free in Christ doesn't mean let's party on . . . anything goes.<sup>v</sup>

Paul wrote to the Corinthians who had evidently adopted the slogan, "All things are lawful for me." And that slogan had of course plunged them into an array of sexual activity and tolerance. And Paul wrote to them the wise balance that reads, "**All things are lawful, but not everything is beneficial**" (**1 Corinthians 6:12**).

William Barclay comments on this text here that our freedom in Christ doesn't mean that we are free to do whatever we'd like to do; it means that we are free to do whatever we ought to do.<sup>vi</sup>

Which is exactly why Peter adds even more balance to his wise counsel – thirdly;

**3. Remember you have been freed only to be mastered by Christ.**

Notice Peter writes again in *verse 16*. ***Act as freemen, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God.*** The word Peter uses for *bondslave* can be more bluntly rendered, slave. It defined the lowest level of servitude in the Greco-Roman world; yet for believers it described their joyous freedom as those who were now under the mastery of Christ.<sup>vii</sup>

This is the paradox of Christianity – you have been freed from the bondage of sin and death – only to become the slave of Jesus Christ. But what a Master!

This is actually the paradox of life for everyone. Everyone is under the mastery of something; everyone is a slave to whatever it is that demands from them their highest allegiance. The question is not, are you a slave? The question is, whose slave are you?

You are either a slave to your own will – your own life – your own career – your own plans – your own desires – your own body – your own intellect; or you are a slave, under the mastery of Christ and you have given to Him your will, your life, your career, your plans, your desires, your body and your intellect. So . . . whose slave are you today? What masters you?

And Peter is effectively implying that slaves of Christ make the best citizens – servants of the kingdom of God produce the greatest service to the kingdoms of earth.

Now with that, Peter picks up some speed and delivers four really short, quick commands that add to his wise counsel for Christian citizens.

**4. Number four in the list, here's the next one; no matter what, show respect for everyone**

Peter writes in *verse 17*. ***Honor all people.***

Literally all human beings.<sup>viii</sup> He isn't telling us to honor everything human beings do, but to show respect to all human beings. Why? Because we believe that every human being has been created in the image of God (*James 3:9*).

The verb *to honor* here means to treat them as valuable.<sup>ix</sup> They are immortal creatures and we treat them – no matter who they are – with a sense of respect knowing that God has created them according to His purposes and they have inherent worth and eternal value.

This is the same word, by the way, that Jesus Christ used in his message from Matthew 15 where He told His audience to honor their father and mother. Same word!

Don't treat them selfishly; don't mistreat them; don't discard them; don't use them for financial gain. Treat them with respect.

The idea of honoring every human being was a staggering thought to these original readers. Their world had an incredibly calloused view of life in the Roman world.

When Peter wrote this letter, there were at last 60 million slaves in the Roman Empire.<sup>x</sup> Life was cheap.

The gospel changed everyone's perspective on everyone. So much so that Paul will tell a slave owner that his runaway slave is now to welcomed back as his brother.

No matter what someone's station is in life, or their color or ethnicity or economic standing – honor every human being.

Listen, the world in Peter's day and in our day ought to know that when they meet a Christian, they're going to meet a person who shows respect to everyone in that office, that classroom, that neighborhood – no matter what. It ought to become the reputation of genuine Christianity.

I love the way one man posed this issue to an atheist he was debating; he asked this question to Oxford philosopher and professor by the name of Jonathan Glover: If you, Professor Glover, were stranded at midnight in a desolate downtown street; and if, as you stepped out of your broken down car with fear and trembling, you were suddenly to hear the sounds of pounding footsteps and laughter coming up behind you, and you saw ten burly young men who had just stepped out of a nearby building and they were coming directly toward you – would it, or would it not make a difference to you to know they were just leaving a Bible study?"

Wouldn't that make a difference – even to an atheist? It should make a world of difference. And this is Peter's point – the reputation of the Christian is that they are respectful of everyone.

D. Edmond Hiebert wrote in his outstanding New Testament commentary that this one command alone is enough to deal a mortal blow to any kind of racial conflicts.<sup>xi</sup> We treat no one with scorn or contempt, but with respect and dignity.

I'm fascinated by the nations that are moving into our community. I've traveled throughout the world and am now watching these cultures moving into our community – their children are playing in our sports leagues . . . they're visiting our church.

Wake County happens to be the fastest growing Hispanic population in the entire country. In fact, only recently another magazine survey declared that Raleigh is the number one place to live in America. Imagine that – Raleigh is the best place to live in America. That's not true of course – it's Cary!

I have living in my neighborhood a family from India. I was driving home some time ago and as soon as I turned into the neighborhood, I smelled curry . . . a block away and I could smell it . . . it immediately cleared up my sinus' . . .

I was talking to a friend of mine from Taiwan some time ago, and I said, "You know, the thing that's tough about you guys is that I can never tell you apart – you all look alike." He laughed and said, "We say the same thing about you guys." I said, "Really?" He said, "Yes, all of you look alike." I guess I do look like Robert Redford and Brad Pitt . . . that explains it!

The truth is, dislike for other cultures or ethnic groups is traceable not to a lack of education or the influence of culture or the state of demographic density; it happens to track back to a fallen nature and a sinful heart.

Try and explain why people hate Jewish people. That hatred can only be explained by Satan's influence upon the heart of the unredeemed so that they will attempt to stamp out ethnic Israel and thus make God's promise of their national future impossible. And God has kept His word. In fact, one of the greatest testimonies to the promise of God to Israel is the fact that Jewish people are still alive. Think about it – you have never met a Philistine; you have never met an Amorite or a Jebusite or a Hittite. But you have met Jews.

At the end of World War II, after the atrocities of the holocaust were fully revealed and Hitler's lieutenants were brought to trial for their crimes – primarily their murder of millions of Jews – Adolf Eichmann, the Nazi leader said – and I quote – "I shall leap in my grave [over the] thought; I have five

million lives on my conscience – [that] is to me a source of inordinate satisfaction."<sup>xii</sup>

The cure for that will never be more education or a new job – the cure will always be salvation and a new heart.

Peter says, I want Christian citizens everywhere to demonstrate this new heart by showing respect for every human.

## **5. Number 5 – Don't forget to love your church deeply**

You might have thought this command would be higher on the list. Pastors would've put it higher – God didn't.

Here it is – *verse 17 again – Honor all people, love the brotherhood.*

This term for *brotherhood* is found only two times in the New Testament and both times, they are found in Peter's letters. He views all believers as a collective unity. This is Peter's term for the church.<sup>xiii</sup>

Here's what Peter is doing. He knows that we will naturally show respect to people in our community who show us respect. We'll treat kindly those neighbors who treat us kindly.

But Peter broadens that to command us to show respect and kindness to every human being we encounter – simply because of the fact that they are created by God; regardless of their response or attitude back . . . and that's much easier to read in the text, than obey in life.

And now with this command, Peter knows that we will naturally love certain Christians; we'll love those in the church that love us back. We'll love those we find lovely.

But again, Peter broadens it so that we are commanded to love every believer – simply because of the fact that they are in the brotherhood. They are members of the family.

And the verb Peter uses for love is *agapao* – the strongest form of commitment and covenant love on the planet. It defies disunity; it denies self; it seeks to serve instead of being served . . . it is the love of Christ demonstrated as He died to pay the ransom price for His church.

So now we too – are commanded to love deeply the ones loved deeply by Christ. How in the world will you ever have this kind of relationship with other people? Only when you have a certain kind of reverence for God.

And with that another command is issued that I'll paraphrase as number 6 in our list of wise counsel for Christian Citizens:

**6. Here's number 6: In all you do, live in awe of God**

Peter writes in *verse 17. Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God.*

To fear God is to revere God; to prioritize God; in fact, if you're not sure who comes first in your life – God, or you, all of life is muddled.

A double minded man is unstable in all his ways (James 1:7). In other words, life gets all muddled up, whenever someone refuses to make up their mind as to who comes first.

Without reverential awe of God, all of life gets covered with fog. And by the way, Peter uses the present tense in this imperative command as if to say, don't stop. Because at any time a Christian can slip back into placing themselves first; so Peter writes, don't stop revering God. Don't stop putting God first.

That relationship isn't first; that desire isn't first; that goal isn't first – and if that relationship or that desire or that goal means that God has to be sidelined and forgotten, you'd better get rid of that relationship, that desire or that goal.

But what does it look like to fear the Lord? Let me give you three characteristics:

**a. First, there is a hunger to read the word of God.**

*David wrote, "How blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who greatly delights in His commandments." (Psalm 112:1) In Psalm 119:103 David writes, "How sweet are your words to my taste, yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth."*

Okay, so the one who fears the Lord wants His word. To put it even more simply; you're really not reverencing the Lord unless you're reading His word.

But the fear of the Lord is more than just reading the word.

**b. Secondly, there is a desire to apply the truth of the word of God.**

David wrote in Psalm 128:1, *Blessed is everyone who fears the Lord, who walks in His ways.*

Solomon spelled it out even more clearly in *Proverbs 14:2, He who walks in uprightness fears the Lord.*

So a person who fears the Lord not only reads the word and applies the truth of the word, but also:

**c. Thirdly, he places his confidence in the word of God.**

David wrote in *Psalm 147:11, "The Lord favors those who fear Him, those who wait for His lovingkindness."*

David draws a relationship between fearing the Lord and waiting on the promises and provision of the Lord, even if they are long in coming. That's what it means to fear the Lord.

Now, Peter gives us one more piece of wise counsel;

First, let me review:

- **Number 1, no matter how it feels, you're actually free**
- **Second, never use your freedom to run wild**
- **Third, you have been freed only to be mastered by Christ**
- **Fourth, no matter what, show respect for everyone**
- **Fifth, don't forget to love the church deeply**
- **Sixth; in all you do, live in awe of God**

One more:

**7. Number 7; no matter who it is, show respect for those in authority**

*Verse 17* comes full circle now as Peter writes, *honor the king.*

There's a little irony here – if not humor – in the mind of Peter.

He uses the same verb he used earlier where he commanded us to *honor all people*. Peter is probably smiling as he writes this – "Listen, even though the emperor thinks he's divine; he's really just another human being like the rest of us."<sup>xiv</sup>

But don't leave him out, either – which is easy to do. Treat him with respect as well. Not as just an object to satisfy you – to give you what you want – but as God's appointed, commissioned, ordained ruler who will, by the hand of God, accomplish whatever God wants to accomplish.

You see, Nero might be ruling, but God will always be overruling. So give respect to his office as much as you can.

An excellent illustration of this – and with this I close – Paul is standing before Ananias the High priest – a scoundrel – a wicked hypocrite hiding behind the mask of piety and religiosity. He planned to kill Paul as well, but before the mob of Jews could reach him, Paul was rescued by the Roman guards.

Sometime later, Paul stood before Ananias and the Sanhedrin – the Jewish Supreme Court in *Acts chapter 23*.

By the way, some New Testament scholars believe Paul’s physical infirmity or – thorn in the flesh – was some sort of disease which affected his eyesight – and this occasion is one of the reasons for that conclusion.

Paul begins to speak to the court and he says, ***Brethren, I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day. The high priest Ananias commanded those standing beside him to strike him on the mouth. Then Paul said to him, “God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall! Do you sit to try me according to the Law, and in violation of the Law order me to be struck?”***

In other words, how dare you violate the law by ordering me to be struck in a courtroom that is supposedly upholding the law?

***But the bystanders said to Paul, “Do you revile God’s high priest?”*** Evidently Paul didn’t recognize who’d given the order. And what you might think Paul would do now is really dig in his heels and let Ananias have it even more. But instead he immediately apologizes and says, ***“I was not aware,***

***brethren, that he was high priest . . . [for] ‘You shall not speak evil of a ruler...’***

Paul’s response delivers a volume of implications: he didn’t yell louder . . . he didn’t threaten or come unhinged . . . instead he apologized and offered respect and deference for the simple fact of the position of authority that this man held.

I also can’t help but think of Daniel – another wonderful illustration – and with this I’ll actually come closer to closing.

Daniel was abducted by a foreign country . . . he would never return home, even after 80 years of faithful service to three different kings.

But he always addressed ***Nebuchadnezzar*** in terms that respectfully identified his rank of royalty; later on, Daniel even gave the wicked King ***Belshazzar*** his proper title when he spoke to him; Daniel treated with respect the following King, ***Darius***, even after Darius capitulated to political pressure and had Daniel thrown to the lions.

And in the end, Nebuchadnezzar and Darius both came to acknowledge the glory and majesty of Yahweh as the true and living God.<sup>xv</sup>

So what do we as citizens of this country do – and say – and act – toward those in our culture and church and in positions of authority? Well, listen to the word of the Lord – ***Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as slaves of God. Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king.***

And who knows . . . perhaps some of them will watch your attitude and your response and come to conclusion – and even perhaps join you – that you are worshipping and revering and honoring the true and living God.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 02/19/2017 by Stephen Davey.

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i Robert L. Alden, *Proverbs: A Commentary on an Ancient Book of Timeless Advice* (Baker, 1983), p.7

ii Wayne Grudem, *Politics* (Zondervan, 2010), p. 29

iii D. Edmond Hiebert, *1 Peter* (BMH, 1984), p. 169

iv William Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter* (Westminster Press, 1976), p. 207



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- v Life Application Bible Commentary: 1 & 2 Peter/Jude (Tyndale House, 1995), p. 66
- vi Barclay (paraphrased), p. 207
- vii John MacArthur, 1 Peter (Moody Publishers, 2004), p. 152
- viii Hiebert, p. 170
- ix Juan R. Sanchez, 1 Peter For You (The Good Book Company, 2016), p. 105
- x Barclay, p. 208
- xi Hiebert, p. 171
- xii Jacob Presser, The Destruction of Dutch Jews, quoted by David Jeremiah in Escape the Coming Night (W Publishing, 1990), p. 125
- xiii Hiebert, p. 170
- xiv Life Application Bible Commentary, p. 68
- xv Adapted from John Phillips, Exploring the Epistles of Peter (Kregel, 2005), p. 116