

1 Peter 2:11-3:12

1. 1 Peter casts the largely Gentile church in the role of the new Israel, as in 1:1, where they are the church in dispersion among the nations. In chapter 2 they are now the people of God (1:10), but even “a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God” (2:9). By emphasizing their unity as the people of God, and describing the benefits of this community identity he helps strengthen their cohesion and resolve in the face of their struggles. However, this emphasis is not without its weakness. For instance,

The chief problem is the sense of exclusive eliteness inherent in designating any group as belonging more closely to God. If a consciousness of being the unique people of God has enabled Israel and the Jews to survive over 3000 years of world history, it also explains some of the dislike and hatred directed toward Jews.¹

Similarly, Peter emphasizes the holiness of the people of God, which doesn’t leave much for those outside the church. “There is no reference to the existence of holiness in outsiders or to reaching out to the non-Christians with any appreciation of the goodness they already have” (RB, 83).

- a. Do you see the pitfall of exclusivity or eliteness at play in the modern church?
 - b. Do modern Western Christians focus on the holiness of God’s elect in a way which could contribute to looking down on unbelievers?
2. Last week we discussed the way in which Peter addresses the shame and loss of status experienced by the Gentile Christians in a culture very much oriented toward honor and status. In particular, responding to their diminished status, Peter focuses on their new social unit, the Church (1:22; 2:9-10). In the face of judgment from fellow Romans, Peter directs their attention on God’s standards of honor and shame (e.g. 1:15-16). Peter also redirects their focus from their first-century lives to the broader eschatological picture (e.g. 1:6-9, 17-18).

Read 2:11-3:12. How does Peter address issues of honor, shame and status in this passage?

3. Both the Greco-Roman and Hellenized Jewish cultures produced what are called “household codes,” which describe the proper roles and attitudes for members of the household. They characteristically address both members in a hierarchical household relationship (husbands and wives, slaves—in this case, domestic slaves—and masters, parents and children). In 1 Peter 2:17-3:7 is a partial household code.²
 - a. What instructions are given to slaves in 2:18-25? What are the motivation and goal of these instructions?
 - b. In 2:21-25, Peter grounds their obedience and good behavior in the suffering of Jesus. Wasn’t Jesus’ suffering specifically in service of his atoning death? What would be the goal of a Roman Christian slave’s “deference” (2:18), and how would that suffering be redemptive?
 - c. Is Peter’s strategy of blending and being good citizens in while remaining distinct appropriate not just for the very hostile first-century Roman milieu, but for our much freer one as well? I.e., when do you pull a Bridge Over the River Kwai as opposed to a French Resistance?

¹ Raymond Brown, *The Churches the Apostles Left Behind*, p. 81.

² household codes (or *Haustafel*) in the NT include Col 3:18-4:1; Eph 5:22-33; 1 Tim 2:8-15; 5:1-2; 6:1-2; Tit 2:1-3:8.

- d. Most of us have experience with unjust authorities. How have you had to apply Peter's advice in the workplace, and to what effect?
 - e. Like Paul in Rom 13, Peter suggests divine authority in lies human power structures, and directs these Gentile Christians to "accept the authority of every human institution" (2:13). Yet Peter himself was not above civil disobedience, as in Acts 5:20-42. When do you think would Peter like you to draw the line and disobey the human authorities?
 - f. In 2:14, Peter places the civil authorities within the scope of God's plan. How would you answer critics who claim this passage supports slavery?
4. In 3:1-7 Peter gives instructions to wives. Plutarch, a Greek historian, biographer and essayist writing during the late first and early second centuries, also had some advice for wives:

That adorns a woman which makes her more decorous—not gold, emeralds, scarlet, but whatever invests her with dignity, good behavior, modesty.

And elsewhere, he writes,

Those who have to go near elephants do not put on bright clothes, nor do those who go near bulls put on red; for the animals are made especially furious by these colors; and tigers, they say, when surrounded by the noise of beaten drums go completely mad and tear themselves to pieces. Since, then, this is also the case with men, that some cannot endure the sight of scarlet and purple clothes, while others are annoyed by cymbals and drums, what terrible hardship is it for women to refrain from such things, and not disquiet or irritate their husbands, but live with them in quiet gentleness?³

Plutarch elsewhere tells a young husband that he can't expect his wife to show restraint in desire for finery unless he does so himself (145C). Similarly, he says that "a husband who expects his wife to be sexually restrained should not engage in wanton behavior himself (144F-145B)."⁴ Clowney sees Plutarch as opposing "gaudy clothing and the equivalent of rock music (cymbals and drums) in connection with the cults that attracted women."

- a. How does Peter's advice differ from Plutarch's? How do the motivations and goals differ?
- b. How do the advice, goals and motivation given to wives differ from those given to slaves? Or husbands?

Clowney (133), when considering both instructions to husbands and wives, writes

The path of Christian living is no different for the husband than for the wife. Both are classed to follow Christ in humble and compassionate love, accepting rebuffs with forgiving grace (3:8-9). Since the husband's role is different, the form of his service is different. The wife is called to be submissive to her husband; the husband is called to honor his wife. That honor includes considerate understanding.

Carson and Beale point out that "it appears as if the wives that Peter has particularly in mind are Christians whose husbands have not yet been converted (3:1)"—but some see Peter addressing Christian couples as well.⁵ Carson and Beale add another oft-overlooked way in which this household code difference from those of the Romans:

³ From *Moralia* 141e and *Advice to Bride and Groom* 144DE, quoted in Edmund Clowney, *The Message of 1 Peter*, 131.

⁴ Quoted in Pheme Perkins, *First and Second Peter, James and Jude*, 56.

⁵ See, for instance, the *Household Code* entry in the *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and its Developments*.

For Peter to address wives and slaves regarding ethical and moral matters was already a breach of social order, for such address was uncommon in the Greco-Roman world. It gives to wives and slaves a moral responsibility and significance that few in the empire would have acknowledged. Yet the unconverted husbands are hardly in a position to complain, since the conduct advocated by the apostle as he addresses their wives actually affirms the husband's authority. The motivation that Peter insists on, however, is not the preservation of Roman social structure but rather what is 'of great worth in God's sight' (3:4). The authority and example of the crucified and risen Redeemer was thus making an impact in Roman culture but in a strangely anomalous fashion. 'In a masterful move, Peter both upholds and subverts the social order.'⁶

- c. Given these factors, are Christian wives, whether in the 1st or 20th centuries, called to submit to Christian husbands? If so, what would it mean to follow the pattern of Sarah and Abraham's relationship?
- d. Similarly, put some flesh on 3:7; what sort of "consideration" is Peter envisioning? How did Abraham do this? How might this aid your prayers? (Cf. 3:12.)

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⁶ *The New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, p. 1036.