

## RESILIENT HOPE // Formed & Faithful

**Romans 13:1**, "Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God."

It's our responsibility as a church to pray for those in office and to make a difference where we've been planted. Moving forward, my concern is that we'll begin to relax and expect our government to solve the problems that God calls the church to solve. Personally, I want biblical morality represented in government, but I will not ever put my hope, my confidence, my trust in any government to solve problems that Christ has called the church to solve. Christian morality without Christ will eventually implode on itself.

**2 Corinthians 3:6** says that the law brings death, but the Spirit brings life. And we can't ever forget that's it's our individual and collective calling by God to follow Christ, become like Him and live as He lived. To show the grace, patience, kindness, forgiveness, and mercy of Christ to a lost, broken, hurting world. Because laws cannot change the human heart, only God can. And we've got work to do. Government is not the answer, Jesus is!

Peter is writing to Christians that are being persecuted and martyred for their faith. Peter's primary concern is not about the evil in the world that needs to be dealt with. His primary concern is the evil that is in them that has the potential to completely distort and mar the image of God within them.

And this is why Peter tells these scattered believers...

**1 Peter 2:11**, "Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul."

This verse introduces a new section of Peter's letter to the church. He begins to instruct Christians on how we are to live in a world that's hostile and how people who are following the way of Jesus are to live in a culture which has a very different opinions and views of the world.

First, he calls us sojourners and exiles. We're not settlers, and we're not visitors; we're exiles. This is not our home, and we're not just passing through. We're not going to

worship the culture, and we're not going to disengage from the culture, but as exiles, our charge is to engage faithfully in the culture. To invest our lives in the flourishing of the place we call home until Jesus returns or calls us into our true homeland.

Then Peter says abstain from the passions of the flesh. The word "passion" is also translated as desire. It's a strong impulse (or what we in the south we might call a "hankering"). But it's not just a desire. It's an **over-desire** for something that moves us toward and into sin that wars against our soul.

Now, when many of us think about abstaining from sin, we think about breaking the rules of the Christian ethic: Lying, drunkenness, sexual immorality, stealing, embezzling funds. While these are all obviously sin, what Peter is warning us against is an over-desire for something that's important to us. Something that we view as "good." An over-desire for something good is even more sinister because you don't even realize it's marring your soul while you're chasing it.

The passions of the flesh, these over-desires that drive us, form us into a type of person. Whether it's an over-desire for comfort and pleasure, which John calls the "lust of the flesh" (1 Jn 2:15), or an over-desire for possessions—the car, the house, the clothes, the appearance (lust of the eyes)—or the pride of life, to be superior to others, to have status, or position, to be significant, to be a "somebody," or to belong to the "right" group with the right views, to be on side whose view is the right one, these over-desires, what we give our time and attention are forming us spiritually.

Everyone is a product of spiritual formation. You are a product of spiritual formation. The question isn't are you being formed spiritually; the question is what are you being formed by? Are you being formed by passions of the flesh? That's why James writes to the church and calls them out.

**James 4:1**, "What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your **passions** [over-desires] are at war **within you**? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel."

He's saying that the division, the strife, the bickering, and broken relationships... all of these things exist because you're being driven by an over-desire for something, and that desire is forming you into the type of person who is self-centered, self-absorbed, and contentious.

Have you ever wondered why, when you turn on the news, or jump on socials, or scroll through your news feed that the vast majority of the content is negative? Sharon McMahon recently talked about hate being one of the most profitable industries in the world. CNN, Fox News, our local media stations, even subscription-based media content, and a vast majority of content creators on social media focus on the most negative, hateful, divisive content. Why? Because our brains are hardwired for survival, which means we're constantly looking for and fixating on the most negative, hateful, divisive information. And it's incredibly lucrative.

The most hateful content creators in mainstream and social media are making over \$10 million dollars a year, not including the money they're receiving from ads, speaking engagements, and book deals. The financial incentives that come with creating hateful, slanderous content is overwhelming and almost irresistible. The next time you're tempted to consume content like this, Jesus asks us simple question.

**Mark 8:36**, "For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?"

So, what are you being formed by? What type of person are you becoming? Are you being driven by the passions of the flesh? By an over-desire, by something you know is wrong, or even by a seemingly good thing? Are you more formed by mainstream media, or by the way of Jesus? Because if we're driven by the desires of the flesh (comfort & pleasure), or the lust of the eyes, or the pride of life (the desire to make a name for yourself), your soul is being formed by those things.

Peter says that as exiles to abstain from these things. But in v. 12, he gives us the positive.

**1 Peter 2:12**, "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."

In v.13, Peter goes into three difficult relationships believers find themselves in.

What it means for Christians to be:

1. Subject to the leadership of non-believing, and often unjust, rulers.
2. Employed by and under the control of an unjust master.
3. Married to an imperfect person.

But before he gets there, Peter says, *“Live such honorable lives among those who don’t believe that when they slander you, when they speak evil of you, that outsiders eventually see your good works, and glorify God because of it.”*

Peter is telling us that one of the greatest signs that you are being formed into Christ’s likeness is that people begin to respond to you in extreme ways. They’re either attracted to the transformative work God has done in and through your life or they’re repulsed by it. Light, in a similar way, is illuminating, but it also can be blinding. Light can be appealing or repelling. And notice this passage doesn’t say, *“If they speak against you as evildoers.”* It says, *“When.”*

Which means if you’re genuinely following Jesus, there will be those who look for any fault they can find in your life. And if they can’t find any, they’ll make something up. If you’re genuinely following Jesus, there will be those who say all kinds of things about you. Don’t be surprised when it happens. Expect it!

This was literally true for Christians in Peter’s day. The early Roman world did not understand followers of Jesus and felt threatened by them. And so, they made up lies about them.

- They thought they were superstitious (they believed in miracles),
- called them atheists (because they denied Roman gods),
- incestuous (they’re marrying their “brothers and sisters”),
- and that they were cannibals (they partook of communion together, the symbol of the body and blood of Christ).

Christians had become the scapegoats for all societal problems in the Roman Empire. When Nero burnt Rome in 64 A.D., he blamed it on the Christians. Later, when the German Visigoths attacked Rome, they blamed the Christians. Peter says, *“Don’t be surprised. Expect it. After all, this is exactly what they did to Jesus and He showed us exactly how to respond.”*

**1 Peter 2:21**, *“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.”*

**1 Peter 2:23**, *“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.”*

What did Jesus do?

1. **He suffered patiently.** Many of us think that if we are a good person, we live morally, nothing bad will ever happen to us. No lies will ever be told about us. That didn't happen with Jesus. Living rightly and honorably doesn't guarantee that we avoid hardship. Jesus lived a perfect life and patiently endured immense injustice and suffering.
2. **He trusted the just Judge.** In other words, he didn't retaliate or revile anyone in return for the injustice He faced. Instead, He looked to His heavenly Father to be His vindication. And if the injustice was never made right on this side of heaven, He knew it would be coming one day.
3. **He overcame evil with good.** Even when He was lied about, He kept healing people, working miracles, forgiving sin. Even when they were nailing Him to the cross, He prayed for their forgiveness. At every step, He didn't retaliate. At every moment where you and I would've been tempted toward retribution, Jesus chose another way.

Peter says that as you follow His example, as you patiently overcome evil with good, you put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. When we receive cruelty, we offer kindness. When we receive slander, we respond by serving others and good works. This is where we are most formed into the image of Jesus—in the crucible of enduring hardship, clinging to the cross.

This is what Pastor Dave Buehring calls ministering in the opposite spirit. In other words, don't play the victim when the world is against you! When the world hates you, don't retaliate, don't play the victim, but overcome evil with good and let God be your vindication.

Where in your life might God be calling you to respond in this way? To follow Christ's example? Is there somewhere you need to release your need for vindication and vengeance and submit it to God, patiently bearing the injustice toward you as you pray, "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do"?

Peter is talking about constantly loving and patiently forgiving after we've been mistreated, even if that means distancing ourselves from harm and forgiving from a distance.

If we approach the world as settlers, we'll be all about vindication. We'll retaliate, we'll respond in the passions of the flesh, we'll give into temptation and be formed into some image other than Christ's. We'll fail to represent His kingdom in a foreign land because we'll treat this place as if it's supposed to be heaven.

If we're visitors, we won't love people that way Christ modeled and commanded us to. We won't take the risks and engage with love and compassion to people in need all around us. We won't fulfill the good works Christ has called us to and we'll be calloused to the people who are far from God in the Christian culture.

But as exiles, and sojourners, knowing that the day of judgment is coming, we have a role in a much bigger story. To engage faithfully, to endure patiently, to persevere through slander and injustice, knowing that through our good deeds, lies will be silenced, and that those that are far from God might come to the knowledge of the truth. Jesus is the King, ruling from His heavenly throne, and He's coming back for His people, and one day, every knee will bow.