

West Valley Church  
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Michael W. O'Neill

## On This Rock Part Four *1 Peter 2:11-3:8*

I don't want this to reflect at all on the wonderful celebration of Mother's Day, but I have to admit to you that this has been a very hard week for me personally. What's made this week especially difficult is the passing of our dear friend, Pastor Arden. He has been a friend, confidant, advisor and mentor to me. There is an unbridled joy in me that brings me to tears when I think about Arden's welcome and reward in heaven. At the very same time I have a profound sense of grief and loss that also brings me to tears. To the world it is strange that we Christians have a hopeful grief; it is beyond their understanding. but like Arden did, we want more than anything for them to know that hope.

I had the privilege of being on the phone with Arden several times over the last four days of his life, and there were things he shared with me that are priceless blessings that I will treasure until I see him again, most of which will remain between him and me. I know he would be very uncomfortable with anything remotely indicating that he was a saint, but I have to tell you, his was a life that reflected Christ.

Today we are going to talk about living a Christ-like life in some very specific settings in ways that can lead others to Christ, from the next passage in our series called, "On This Rock" – Peter and the Church. So would you turn in your Bibles to 1 Peter 2:11-3:8; that's 1 Peter 2:11-3:8, and like we've been doing, I'm going to ask you to pause this video and read it before we move on. If you are watching this with others, appoint someone to be the reader, and have them read aloud for you this passage. This is an interesting passage that's going to be fun figuring out. So pause this video now and read 1 Peter 2:11-3:8.

*Pause*

Remember that so far, all of this has been addressing how important it is for us to become more and more like Christ, deeper in relationship with him and closer to him. So now Peter talks about how *that* relationship with Christ is going to have an impact on three other relationships you have.

But first, Peter calls them "beloved." Your Bible might say "dear friends," but that's kind of a weak translation of the depth of meaning in that one word. It's a word that wasn't used in common Greek culture but is used frequently and broadly through the New Testament. It has a double meaning: it implies the deep affection that Peter has for his readers, as an example of what Peter's been telling us so far – that as Christians we must love each other selflessly. Secondly, it also reminds them of the deep love God has for them as his children. They are beloved by God and of each other. So we're already off to a powerful start.

First, let's see how to be...

## 1. Christlike in Society (2:11-17)

Peter calls them “foreigners and exiles,” or “aliens and strangers.” Peter uses that description as an affirmation that they live differently than the world around them – and so do we. So Peter urges them and us to “abstain from sinful desires.” The phrase literally means, “be distant,” or “keep away” from sinful desires. So let me put that in terms we understand today: *practice social distancing from sinful desires!* Six feet isn’t far enough distance between you and sin! The phrase is a present-tense verb, meaning that you and I should always, at all times, be in the constant habit of staying socially distant from sinful desires.

What are those sinful desires? Let me put it this way: your primary relationship is with Jesus, so anything that seeks to draw your attention and devotion away from him is what you should avoid. John Wesley was a great preacher and theologian, and his mother Susanna used to tell him, “Whatever weakens your reason, impairs the tenderness of your conscience, obscures your sense of God, takes off your relish for spiritual things, whatever increases the authority of the body over the mind, that thing is sin to you, however innocent it may seem in itself.” That’s good advice: social distancing from sin.

Then Peter goes into how we need to behave in relation to society, or how to act Christlike in our culture. In that culture, as the numbers and notoriety of Christians grew, so did people’s opinions and gossip and resentment about them. Society heard that Christians loved Jesus first, and that they shared in communion regularly. Christians often had communion as a part of a kind of potluck that they called “agape” or the “love feast.” So the urban legends were that Christians broke down family relationships (because they loved Jesus first), that they participated in cannibalism (because communion involved the body and blood of Jesus), and that Christians had these wild sex parties (because they called their potlucks “love feasts”) and worst of all, they were disloyal to Caesar (because of their loyalty to Christ before any government). Those were twisted lies, of course, but it justified people’s hatred toward them, so the Christians were being blamed for more and more things. In fact, within just a few years Nero would blame them for the great fire of Rome.

So against that backdrop, Peter reminds them to obey their governors and rulers. Here’s why: the rulers and governors and the civil laws at their best, exist primarily to protect people and create a safe society. So the Christians needed to contribute to those goals by the way they lived – *just like we today are being asked to shelter in place*. Because if the Christians lived upright and godly lives, loving all people and obeying civil law, then their actions would disprove the lies that were being told about them. If people were going to accuse them, they would have to make up lies, which meant the Christians weren’t being punished for doing wrong, they were being punished for doing *right* – and that is called persecution. And Peter already told them that if they were persecuted, they should rejoice because they were being treated like Jesus was, so they were becoming more like Jesus!

That didn’t mean they should obey *every* law; if the civil law was in violation of God’s commands and God’s Word, then that was a *different* thing; believers should *always* obey God first. Remember in Acts 4, Peter and John were arrested by the religious leaders and told to stop talking about Jesus:

“But Peter and John replied, ‘Which is right in God’s eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges!’” (Acts 4:19)

Here’s the point: our citizenship is in Heaven, not here. We are *not* first citizens and patriots of the US and then secondly Christians; we are ONLY citizens of heaven and loyal to Christ. But we *will* obey this world’s laws *unless* they require us to violate God’s clear commands. So listen – if you think that being asked to stay at home, and not being able to go to church is a violation of your faith, it’s *not*. Your citizenship is in Heaven, not here. The constitution might be the law of this country, but it’s not the Word of God – that is what you live by FIRST and always. So sheltering in place is for the good of people around you. You might feel that temporarily sheltering in place is a violation of your *civil* rights – and maybe it is. I’m sure that due process will work that out in each state. But doing what we’re doing right now is not a violation of your *Kingdom* citizenship (and if anything, it is in keeping with it). The people Peter wrote to were exiles because of their faith; they couldn’t worship together either, but nowhere does Peter say that is violating *their* faith. So chin up!

The next section deals with something that you might think isn’t really relevant to our lives today, and that’s Peter’s instructions to be...

## **2. Christlike in Slavery (2:18-25)**

First of all, let me just say that this does *not* condone slavery. That was the argument that some used in the 1800’s to justify slavery. But this passage does not do that. Let me quickly explain what it *is* saying, and then how it applies to us.

To understand this, we’ve first got to understand slavery in first century Rome. By the time Peter wrote this, it’s estimated that there were sixty million slaves in the Roman empire. They were vital to the economy. Slaves were what we might today call “essential workers.” Doctors, teachers, musicians, actors, secretaries, stewards were all slaves. The ideal Roman was someone who had somebody else to do their work for them while they were pampered. So slavery involved almost *all* types of work. But it is important to say that slaves in those days were never enslaved purely for the color of their skin. Many slaves were loved by their masters and treated as if they were part of the family. But don’t get the wrong impression – slaves were still property. They were not allowed to be married. If a child was born to a slave the child was the property of the master. Slaves had very little rights, so it was easy for them to be abused in all kinds of ways and there wasn’t anything they could do about it, unless they could prove that it was far beyond cruel and unusual. Some were indentured, so they could be free by paying off their debt or serving their time, but many could not be free unless the owner was willing to go through a process of great expense and time. So while their jobs were similar to ours, there was also room for rampant abuse.

Now, Peter would never have condoned mistreating another person, whether they were slave or free (nor would any other New Testament leader for that matter). Listen: Christians hold that in Christ *all* are equal in God’s eyes. Paul said:

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:28)

All social barriers were broken down in the Church. So no Christian slave owner could mistreat his slave, because he or she was a brother or sister in Christ. By the same token, no slave could be insubordinate to his or her master just because the master was a Christian.

Also, because the gospel was so liberating, there were many slaves who became Christians who still worked for masters who were not Christian. So Peter is giving advice here: do your jobs and do them well with a good attitude. If you get punished for doing a bad job or being insubordinate, well, you deserved it. If you are punished for doing *right*, then you are being persecuted – and you should rejoice because then you are being treated like Jesus and becoming more like him! Besides, by your kindness to your unbelieving master, you might actually be able to lead *your master* to faith in Christ!

I think the application of this is clear: when you are working, do your job and do it to the best of your ability, maintaining a great attitude toward your boss, and be happy if they treat you well for doing good. Be joyful if they mistreat you for doing good, because then you are being persecuted, and you are being and becoming like Jesus. But, if you are punished for being lazy or insubordinate, don't claim it's because you are a Christian; it's because you are a jerk – you are just getting what you deserve. Make sense?

Okay, finally Peter tells us to be...

### **3. Christlike as a Spouse (3:1-8)**

I can't tell you how many times as a pastor I've counselled Christian women who have been abused by their husbands, and some fundamentalist preacher told them they had to stay in the marriage and be submissive. That is NOT what this passage says – not at all. In fact, just the opposite. Let me explain. In ancient civilization and in Judaism, a woman had no rights at all. She was a possession – like a slave. Romans would say that a wife should “stay indoors and be obedient to her husband.” Her husband could divorce her on a whim, but she had no rights of her own. But then, along came Christ and the Church. Suddenly women and men were equals, in fact women were preachers and apostles. So if a man became a Christian, he was to begin treating his wife with respect and love as an *equal* child of God, equal to the husband in every way. So *that's* what Peter is saying at the end of this section.

But, if a wife became a Christian and the husband was not, well then it was very similar to the slave's situation. Peter said, “Treat your husband with love and respect all the time. If he treats you well for being good to him – great! But if he treats you poorly for being good to him, then you are being persecuted, so rejoice! You are being treated like Jesus and becoming like him! And you might actually lead your husband to faith in Christ!

But let me clarify a couple of things: First, when Peter says that the husband might be won over without words, he is not saying women were not allowed to speak. He's saying that actions always speak louder than words. Second, Peter is not saying that women should always wear floor length prairie dresses and shouldn't try to look their best – they should! But looking your best means that beauty begins in your heart, moves to your character, and drives how you dress. So don't try to be alluring to compensate for what's lacking inside

you, and neither should your appearance show vanity. Just let how you carry yourself and how you look reflect the beauty that is already in you through Christ.

Let me clear up this other thing in verse six that says a woman should call her husband “Lord” or “master,” as if she was a slave. Unfortunately those translations might be literally accurate, but they are not culturally accurate. The better translations might say instead to call the husband “sir,” or “with respect,” or “my dear husband.” Peter is saying, “Be respectful and treat him with lovingkindness.” Peter is *not* telling wives that they are slaves! The New Testament is always clear: the master of the wife is Christ and the master of the husband is Christ. Husbands and wives are to be treated as equals.

So Peter would never tell a wife to submit to an abusive husband, nor should she submit her children to abuse. In fact, “in the Bible, all violence is considered an offence against God and against humanity. Scripture is full of condemnations of violence – time and again violence is associated with wickedness and condemned as “detestable to the Lord” (Psalm 11, Proverbs 3 & 10)”.<sup>1</sup>

But keep this in mind: we’ve also got to be careful not to read *into* this passage the values and culture of today, in 2020 in the US. The idea of marriage as an intimate relationship between husband and wife is a relatively modern concept. The truth is, Mediterranean culture in the first century did not expect emotional intimacy between a husband and wife. In that time a man was closer to his mother and siblings, while a wife was closer to her children and siblings. And keep that in mind when Peter calls women “the weaker partner” – he’s not saying they are weaker in intellect or wisdom or value, he means (back then) they were weaker physically. Most men worked at physical labor in an agrarian society; women raised their children and cared for the home. No less hard work, but not quite as physically demanding. So men were typically physically stronger than women. The reason Peter writes this to men is a warning against being oppressive or abusive, and again he reminds them that women are equal heirs in Christ.

The whole point of this section is that in a Christian marriage there is *mutual* submission or reciprocity; they are to both equally value, honor, and esteem the other. Does that make sense?

I hope it does, because by now, if you are married you’ve been cooped up in the same house together for eight weeks. It is a miracle in itself that you haven’t killed each other! Just kidding; but sheltering in place is giving you both a lot of opportunity to put this into practice!

In *all* situations and in *all* relationships, love Christ first and follow God’s Word, ahead of anything or anyone else. Love and serve others, whether it is your neighbors in society, your bosses at work, or your spouses at home. If you suffer for doing right, take joy! You are being treated like Christ was, so you are becoming more like him. And who knows – by doing so you might lead others to a relationship to Christ also - simply by your love.

*Pray*

As our benediction, now listen to this worshipful song.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.saferresource.org.au/the\\_bible\\_on\\_domestic\\_family\\_violence](https://www.saferresource.org.au/the_bible_on_domestic_family_violence)