

GROWTH GROUPS WEEK 5

WEEK OF OCTOBER 13



GROWTH GROUP FALL 2019

STRANGERS IN A STRANGE LAND: FINDING HOPE IN 1ST PETER

WEEK 5 – OCTOBER 13, 2019 - 1 PETER 2:11-17

SETTING THE CONTEXT

In 1 Peter 2:4-10 Peter had reminded his listeners who they were. They were chosen by God, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession. In this next section he moves to personal application. As believers live out their faith in the world, they are to honor the government of the land and serve the people in their own community. Peter addresses how the freedom we have experienced in Christ helps in this endeavor.

The verb "abstain" (NIV) or "keep away" (NLT) literally means to distance oneself. In light of the idea of being temporary residents or foreigners his listeners are to keep from adopting the customs of the land through which they are traveling. Temptations abound in this world and Peter warns his listeners to keep their distance.

Peter tells his listeners, that they should lead such good or proper lives, that the unbelievers amongst them will see and appreciate their behavior. His hope is that the world will see the good deeds of those who believe. The word for "good" that is used here has the connotation of a good that is beautiful or attractive. It is the same word that Jesus used in the Sermon on the Mount when he said to let your light shine before the world so that the world might see your "good" (acts of beauty) deeds and praise God who is in heaven.

It should be noted that Peter is not talking about submission to institutions, but rather to people who have been given certain roles in governing institutions. We are not to worship human leaders, as Caesar asked people to do, but we are to show them honor and to submit to them. This of course is often difficult to accomplish because we live in a broken world. How are we to relate to the "kingdoms" of this world?

Peter had watched Jesus do this. Jesus didn't destroy others, but came to save them. He came to bring blessing, not just judgment. He did not take up the sword, but had actually told Peter to put down his sword after he had cut off the right ear of the high priest's servant (John 18:10). Just as the Jews had learned to submit to the governmental authorities during the time of the Diaspora, so were the followers of Jesus to also submit and respect the governmental authorities.



The struggle from some 2000 years ago, about how to live in community and how to honor government officials and structures, has not gotten any easier. Believers still struggle with how to be in this world, but not of this world. To read about this issue, from the perspective of the apostle Paul, you can read Romans 13:1-7.

EXPLORING THE TEXT

Read 1 Peter 2:11-17

¹¹ Dear friends, I warn you as “temporary residents and foreigners” to keep away from worldly desires that wage war against your very souls. ¹² Be careful to live properly among your unbelieving neighbors. Then even if they accuse you of doing wrong, they will see your honorable behavior, and they will give honor to God when he judges the world. ¹³ For the Lord’s sake, submit to all human authority—whether the king as head of state, ¹⁴ or the officials he has appointed. For the king has sent them to punish those who do wrong and to honor those who do right. ¹⁵ It is God’s will that your honorable lives should silence those ignorant people who make foolish accusations against you. ¹⁶ For you are free, yet you are God’s slaves, so don’t use your freedom as an excuse to do evil. ¹⁷ Respect everyone, and love the family of believers. Fear God, and respect the king.

- 1) How well do you know your neighbors, and how well do you get along with them?
- 2) Five weeks into this series, we revisit the distinction from week one on being a foreigner in this world, rather than a citizen. How is that going for you, how do you make that distinction?
- 3) Verse 12 speaks of reputation. Do you think friends, neighbors and co-workers see you as just a good person, or as a Christian?
- 4) Share a time you realized that people were watching you. Have you been “called-out” for behavior you thought no one saw? How does knowing that people are watching you change your behavior at work, at home, in front of your kids, and online?
- 5) This passage talks about submitting to worldly authorities. In the Greek, “submit” is voluntary, (i.e. Jesus submitted to death). Some translations say “respect” or “honor”. How do we as Christians do this in a very politically divided world?
- 6) There are great Christian leaders who could not tolerate their worldly leadership (Dietrich Bonhoeffer was involved in an attempt to assassinate Hitler, Dr. King urged civil disobedience and unrest). Discuss balancing this with “submit to all human authority”.
- 7) Sometimes as Christians we can take God’s grace for granted. As a believer, do we get a pass on living correctly? (We’re already forgiven, right?) How can we maintain a posture of “good ambassador”, for Christ’s kingdom?

BRINGING IT HOME

- 8) Instead of a final question, here’s a challenge. Meet a neighbor you don’t know this week. Go knock on a door, say hello, introduce yourself. Try and change a “recognizable stranger” into someone you know, at least a little something about. Report back next week.