

AUTHORITY OR AUTHENTICITY?, 1PETER 2:11-25

A New Hope #5

◆**Intro:** I think you will agree that personal freedom is one of our modern day idols. “My body, my choice!” goes the slogan. We are encouraged to be tolerant, nice and accepting, letting everyone live “authentically” who they are comfortable being, or so the jargon goes. You might have heard about Lia Thomas, a swimmer for the University of Pennsylvania who, after swimming on the men’s team for three years as Will Thomas, now competes on the women’s team. The results have been predictable. As of December, Thomas had recorded the **fastest times** in women’s college swimming in the 200 and 500 freestyle and won a 1650 meter freestyle event by **nearly 40 seconds**. It turns out men are very fast women. And now women on the team are not so in favor of the free, liberal approach to identity.

◆Freedom is a tricky idea that we easily distort. Tim Keller writes, “Freedom has come to be defined as the absence of any limitations or constraints on us. By this definition, the fewer boundaries we have on our choices and actions, the freer we feel ourselves to be.” But this definition turns out to be harming us. It’s unworkable.

◆Let’s suppose a fish feels constrained by the sea and so jumps out onto the beach, and then lays there gasping for breath while telling itself “I’m free! I’m free!” You’d say that fish needs some help getting back into the water where it can really live freely. Not surprisingly, our modern culture is a lot like that fish. Take for example the recent phenomena

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of “furrries” today; people who chose to identify as animals and dress accordingly, a step beyond men pretending to be women. But in the name of authentic living, and perhaps out of fear of being called names that end with “-phobe”, no one tells the Emperor that he isn’t wearing any clothes.

◆ At first glance, our text today doesn’t sound all that freedom-affirming, does it? The Apostle Peter tells the first Century Christians scattered across Turkey that they need to behave well, do good, honor authority and law (boundaries), and even be respectful of unreasonable people. Essentially he argues that freedom is not so much the absence of restrictions as finding the right ones, those that fit with the realities of our own nature and those of the world. And beyond that, godliness is more hopeful than personal freedom.

◆ Why be good? Why behave? Why obey a law I don’t like? Why voluntarily submit my personal freedom to structures that exist all around me? How we think about these greatly affects whether we live frustrated, unfulfilled, gasping-on-the-beach lives, or hopeful, grateful lives. How we look at authority, structure, law, morality over against our personal lusts, rights, desires, and freedoms will affect how hopeful we are. Do you want hope? Consider Peter’s teaching in our text.

◆ Peter makes a case for obedient, good, submissive behavior from those who follow Jesus.

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◆ **1. Argument for good behavior: there's more to life than this.** This life is temporary. Why live a "good life" as opposed to doing whatever I feel like, whenever I want? Well first of all, by merely recognizing that some things are actually good and some things are not (we call that the moral law within) we are admitting that there must be a standard that transcends people and their opinions. Every known culture recognizes standards of right and wrong, although in America we are rejecting the idea altogether.

◆ If we don't believe in a God, or an absolute truth, then it's a small step to not believing in male or female, or not believing in law enforcement. Those things just get in the way of our being what we want, or taking what we want.

◆ If we are merely evolutionary accidents, how do we account for this persistent reality we all feel, namely "some things are not right"? Christians acknowledge that God's existence alone explains that standard.

◆ That being said, Why should I obey good, or God? The short answer is that this life is not all there is. There is more beyond the grave, (another awareness you find in every culture). Peter says it's hopeful to do good because goodness fits with the life that's coming, the real one, the eternal one. We are aliens here. We are all on a journey to another life

◆ (V11-12) *I urge you as aliens and strangers in the world.*

Do you ever feel like this world is not enough? Do you ever

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feel like you don't fit here? Like things are not what they ought to be? I suggest that you are correct and you are being sensitive to the spiritual reality many ignore altogether. This is a good step.

◆ Now doing the right thing will not always bring you comfort here, but that's ok, if there is more than here. Sometimes doing the wrong thing feels good in the moment, or appears to benefit our feelings, or our income, or our status in this life. But that's not really ok, if there is more than here. There is, says Peter.

◆ 2. Argument for good behavior: it gives your soul peace.

Bear in mind that the good behavior Peter encourages of his readers is not attempts to earn salvation. That will never give you peace. Christian goodness is always only a response to the unbelievable free gift of eternal life through Jesus. Nevertheless, sinful desires give our souls war (v11). Therefore, godly desires give our souls peace. Think of anything you're doing, or have done that you knew intuitively wasn't right. Did it fulfill you? Were you deeply satisfied? Did you feel better about yourself afterward?

◆ Now the popular solution in our world today is to disbelieve that there is such thing as wrong, or right. Then we don't have to feel bad, or good about how we behave. But if you look closely, people who choose this option aren't very hopeful people. They're just constantly hungry, and never

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full. The hope-filled life is directly linked with living the godly life.

◆ *Psalms 97:11 (NLT) Light shines on the godly, and joy on those whose hearts are right.*

◆ Believe it or not, your soul is as vulnerable as your body. You take care of your body. Why not take equal care of your soul? How we live daily affects the health of our soul (*v11 war against your soul*). There's more than being pretty. There's more than shoe fashions. There's more than being an athlete or getting that degree, or being famous. People with all these still can hurt desperately in their soul, even to the point of jumping off high buildings. So next time you fret about if your makeup is as good as all the other girls, or if you've won more often than the friend you compete with, or if you'll ever be published, you need to tell yourself, "My soul is more than all this. God says my soul is of eternal value." I must remind you that the true God is forgiving, and your failure isn't ever final with him. He freely gives goodness because that's who he is.

◆ **3. Argument for good behavior: it points to God.** Now this is particularly directed to the follower of God. Peter emphasizes that they are to live well *among the gentiles*. (V12) Their faith is their motive and pointing to God is their objective. A believer in Jesus works at living a clean life so that other people might want it and then also discover the source, namely God.

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- ◆ People will inevitably make fun of people who are wholesome and upright. As an example we might consider how the once wholesome and endearing Hannah Montana grew up into Miley Cyrus. The mockery of goodness seems to have taken a deep toll on some. It's the nature of a sinful world and our own sense of guilt to mock goodness. It's so illogical isn't it? We make fun of the good person. But everyone wants the wholesome person on their side when they're in trouble or danger. Peter says, live wholesome lives with the objective of others being convinced to seek God's love too. (cf *glorify God on the day he visits us*. This could mean that they'd be saved through faith on Judgement Day, or that when God taps on their heart and invites them to follow, the good lives of his people help convince them to respond. Either way the points the same.)
- ◆ Respectful behavior is spiritually influential. Respectful disagreement, for example, opens others to consider what you say. Honoring an opponent or enemy can win an audience in someone's heart. We know the opposite is true. Just look at how much people pass off truth because the carrier behaved badly.
 - ◆ So Peter says *be servant like, show respect to everyone, love your Christian family too, fear God but also honor whoever's in charge.* (V16-17)
 - ◆ Let's apply this to the popular chant we hear about in which President Biden is referred to as Brandon. If you

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don't know that background all you need is the internet. Let me say, that while I am no fan of the flatly destructive, and delusional policies of the current Administration, such a crude chant aimed at the office of the President is unfitting for Christians and is the opposite of what Peter is preaching here. God calls his people to honor authorities for the office they hold, even if we wholly disagree with them.

◆cf. v 18 *but also to those who are harsh...*

◆We are reminded repeatedly in Scripture that all authorities exist at the allowance of God who is over all.

◆*Romans.13:1 Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.*

◆Even in the worst of circumstances God's people are to maintain God's character. The prophet Daniel certainly didn't condone or agree with all the actions and beliefs of the King of Babylon! Yet he served in his court his entire life, and his influence extends into today!

◆Your witness can be nullified or verified by your behavior. You say you are Christian, but you have the same morals, and habits as everyone else. Their conclusion? Christianity makes no difference. It's just a show. But remember what we learned from last weeks text: We are being priests to the world! Our objective is bringing the two sides of God and man together.

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◆ **4. Argument for good behavior: Jesus did it and look at the result of his life!** This is the clincher. Everything within you may rebel and fight for your own freedoms and your own desires, and your own opinions, but human history has shown us that you won't find salvation there, no matter how you define it. Jesus' approach to evil was to absorb it in himself. He suffered instead of demanding his own identity. He is God in the flesh, but did not trumpet his own worth. Peter says that's our example.

◆ V21-23

◆ And the end result? Sin has been given the death blow and proved to be the method that is destined to lose. Righteousness actually becomes possible for us. His dying became our living.

◆ V25 *by his wounds you are healed.*

◆ Peter here quotes the famous prophecy of Isaiah 53 which speaks of the coming Messiah in terms of a suffering servant.

◆ Read Isa. 53:4-11...

◆ Six hundred years before Jesus lived, Isaiah perfectly described his life. Fallen human beings have hope in the face of a holy God, because that God sent his son to die a human death that bore the eternal wrath we deserved, so that we humans get to live on into eternity by faith in him. He is the wounded healer. If Jesus' example can result in a heavenly destiny, do we not suppose that following his example in this life is not the better choice? It's God's method of operation.

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◆**Conclusion:** So, if you are a Christian, you are called to absorb other peoples sin, to return good for evil, to leave revenge to God alone. When you get fouled under the basket, you don't return the favor. When people tell lies about you, you don't tells lies about them. When you know that you won't look cool to your friends if you don't go along on a dirty deed, you take that suffering. You honor law enforcement for the office and responsibility they have, even if you don't particularly like a given person. You do good whether you suffer for it or not, because it's right. It's commended by God. It aims beyond this life. It keeps your soul in peace. It points the world to God the true source of good. And it's like Jesus, whose wounds healed you and forgave your sin so that an eternity of good is your future.