

May 31/June 1, 2025

Politics
Everyday Disciples Series
1 Peter 2:11-17
Pastor Ryan Harmon

So, this morning marks the last Sunday in our *Everyday Disciples Series*. Our topic this morning is **Politics**, which might lead you to ask, “What does being a disciple of Jesus have to do with politics?” And the answer is, “Everything!” Can I start with a strong statement that you might disagree with? As human beings, it is impossible not to be political. To be human is to be political. Now throughout this series we've been talking about what it means to be a disciple, and we've said to be a disciple is to be “*all in*” with Jesus. I like to think of disciples as people who are with Him, learning from Him how to be like Him in everything. Now, if both those statements are true: to be human is to be political and to be a disciple is to be with Him in everything...learning from Him...becoming like Him...then, as disciples, we have to talk about politics.

Now, it is a complex subject. It is a controversial subject. I want to promise you this morning, I'm not going to give you my opinion. My goal this morning, as we do each week at Berean, is to go to the Scriptures and see what the Scriptures say about these things. That's the good stuff, and that's going to be what we do this morning. So, I'd invite you to turn with me in your Bibles to 1 Peter, Chapter 2. As you turn there, let me clarify my strong statement—not weaken it, but to clarify it.

It's likely, when I said that, as human beings it's impossible to not be political—to be human is to be political—it is likely that most of our minds went to political parties, to partisan political groups, to Republicans and Democrats. Those partisan groups have a purpose. They serve a purpose within our political system. I'm not here to talk about their benefits or their downfalls at all. But I am seeking to clarify that when I say to be human is to be political, I don't mean political parties. To be political, in the strictest sense, is a word that is derived from the Greek word *Polis*. That Greek word polis means *city*. You could think of it as community, but it literally means city. But because of that, to be political means that as people that gather in cities, as people that gather in communities, we have a responsibility, a necessity, to figure out how to organize our lives together. How do we gather together and live a shared life within our communities, within our cities? That process, that conversation is what it means to be political. Strictly speaking, when we talk about politics, we do it all the time. It happens in all arenas of life. Now, unfortunately, the dialog in our world, in the realm of politics, specifically in government, is one that has become quite ugly, quite chaotic, quite messy. There's no doubt about that. So the question for us is, “How do we, as disciples of Jesus, navigate that conversation as people who, because we're disciples, are called to be different?”

So, 1 Peter 2, beginning in verse 11, begins by offering the church a general statement, an overarching charge or exhortation, for how we are to operate in general in life as believers. So, he begins in verse 11, saying, **Beloved**. In other words, this is written to believers—you and me, the church, brothers and sisters in Christ.

Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against your soul. (*NASB, 1 Peter 2:11)

Now that phrase **aliens and strangers** introduces the tension each of us live under every single day as we live our lives out in the public sphere as **aliens and strangers**. To be an **alien** is to be a *foreigner*. It's to *not belong*. In a strict sense, to be a **stranger** is to be a *visitor*. Do you think of yourself or have you formed an identity in Christ that understands, acknowledges, accepts that you are an alien, you are a stranger? To be an alien or a stranger, strictly speaking, is to not belong. And I think we can admit not belonging somewhere is an uncomfortable feeling. We don't like that feeling very much. We don't like to feel like we're outsiders or like we're different. We don't like to not belong. We want to belong. But the reality is, that as followers of Jesus, we're **aliens**; we're different.

I talk about this often with my kids, because they'll say something like, "Our friends get to do such and such," and I'll say, "Well, I'm sorry. We're weird. We're a little odd. We're aliens. We're strangers." Elsewhere Peter refers to believers as *exiles*. We're out of place. Really, we've been talking about this throughout this entire series, that as we face challenges in this world, we don't take our cues from the world. So, as we approach things like technology and worry and anxiety and sex and politics, we don't take our cues from the world. We take our cues from Jesus. As disciples we are **aliens and strangers**, which means we can say we aren't from here.

Where are we from? Maybe a better question is, "Who are we from? We're from God. Our life is from Him. The life we're now living, we live in service to Him. We belong to Jesus. We name Him as King. We just sang it. He is the king. We belong to a different kingdom. We are citizens of His kingdom. That changes everything about the way that we operate in the world. We live here, but we don't derive our life from here. We derive our life from Him. We've been set free. Throughout this series, we've been saying over and over again we've been set free to live different lives, and specifically Peter says, "Because of our identity, because we are aliens and strangers that belong to a different kingdom, we don't just go along with what the world says. We live differently, and that means we're **free to abstain**, (he says) **from fleshly lusts, which wage war against your soul**."

Fleshly lusts are simply the things that the world throws at us. Certainly that includes sexual immorality. We talked about that last week. The things that we do in the flesh or by the flesh are the things that we can handle just fine for ourselves. We don't need God for those things. The world has no choice but to entertain fleshly lust. That's the only thing they know. But we've been set free from fleshly lust, the things of the world that wage war against our soul. They no longer have a hold on us. We get to live differently, and that affects everything. And as Peter goes on, he is going to speak more generally about our posture in life as we live in the world at large. He says in verse 12:

Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles,

(Now, when you read **among the Gentiles**, at least in this context, just think "out there". Keep your behavior excellent as you're "out there" in all the different arenas of life where non-believers are.)

...so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe *them*, glorify God in the day of visitation.

So because we are **aliens and strangers**, we are not going to make sense to the world. Sometimes that means they will slander us, make fun of us, or poke fun at us. Generally, when we don't understand things, we have to find a way to deal with it, and the way the world will deal with us is either to fight against us or to slander us. So Peter talks about our behavior. As we are out in public, our behavior is to be **excellent among the Gentiles**. So we need to talk about our behavior for just a moment, because as human beings, we so naturally start to think about behavior in a legalistic way. We start to hear him talk about behavior and we think of it as mere behavior management, just trying to keep everything in order through the strength that we can provide. Behavior management is not what Peter's talking about. The Bible is never talking about mere behavior management.

When the Bible talks about our behavior, it always is talking about it in a gospel-power way. The gospel has power to bring about change. The gospel comes into our life and God, by His Spirit, comes into our life and changes us internally, and that internal change then results in different external behavior. It has a result externally, but it's not because we're managing it. It's because God's power works. God changes the very source of our behavior. He comes and works at the level of our heart, at the level of our mind. He helps us think new things, believe new things, live by faith, and that works its way out into our life naturally, by His power, not because we have a tight grip on life, but because His power is effective. That's gospel change. That's the change that God frees us to pursue, frees us to have transformed living, be what flows from us. And what Peter is saying is that the transformation that is brought about by God, by His grace and by His power, will lead us to live excellent lives. Our behavior will be excellent, will engage in good deeds. And God will then cause the outside world, which is observing everything in this public sphere, God will cause the outside world to be astounded and at the end to glorify Him, at the day of His visitation. That's just simply referring to that day when God will make all things right. That's how God wants to work through us as we live these public lives.

So the question is, “Does behavior matter?” And the answer is, “Yes, our behavior matters.” It doesn't matter in the sense that we aren't trying to make God happy with us. It doesn't matter in the sense that we aren't earning anything from God. We aren't acting *good*, so he's obligated to bless us. It's not about that. Behavior matters, because the gospel changes lives. And when the gospel comes in, when grace comes in, when the power of God comes into our lives, it brings about change. And there is evidence of that change in our behavior...things we call the fruit of the Spirit. We live lives marked by love and joy and peace, not because we're trying really hard, but because *the gospel changes lives*. That's the first reason it matters. We believe *the gospel has power*.

The second reason is that it is very much *a strategy of God*. God uses our transformed lives in the public sphere to *bear witness to what He is like*, to demonstrate His very power. He bears witness to who He is, the power He has to change lives. And the watching world—the world that observes in a crazy way—will somehow come to glorify Him in that final day. God wants to use us to have our very lives transformed by Him...to bear witness in the world. Contrary to popular belief, our faith is not private. Our faith is very public. We are called, designed by God, to bear witness publicly to what He is like.

Now, as Peter continues with all of that as a framework, a foundation, he now turns to the very specific realm of politics, and government especially. And the question is, “As people who are

citizens of the kingdom of God, how do we navigate the tension of living in this world with kingdoms that are simply or merely of this earth?" So he continues, and he says in verse 13,

Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. (Vs. 13-14)

That is a hard verse. **Submit yourselves, for the Lord's sake, to every human institution.** Peter's charge here, his exhortation, is not subtle, and it's not a suggestion. It's a command. It's in what we call the imperative mood. He's not saying, "Maybe think about this." He's saying, "Do it. **Submit yourselves.**" And then he provides motivation for this submission. We're to submit, **for the Lord's sake.**

Now, as I began, I talked about the definition of politics in a strict sense. Politics, strictly speaking, is just the process, the conversation, everything that's involved with trying to figure out how to live a common life together. And it happens all over. It happens in businesses, happens in churches, happens here, happens in families, happens on sports teams. Your softball team has an order to it, a way that you're supposed to operate...rules so to speak...guidelines for how we all are going to function together well. So this is an orderly process, and we all can be in a place where we cooperate together in this common thing that we're doing. We all know that when someone begins to violate those rules of order and the way that we've agreed we're going to operate, what happens is, chaos ensues, and it becomes very uncomfortable for everyone. It's important, whether it be in a business or a family, in a church or a sports team, that the members of that community submit to what has been agreed to, so that allows it to function well.

So now, as we turn our attention to government, we also have to acknowledge God's design for government. By God's design, by His sovereign will, He has established that the role of government in the world is to keep order in society at large. These large communities can be quite unwieldy, hard to manage, easy for chaos to ensue. So God, by His design, has instituted, has given authority to worldly governments to keep order in society at large. And as Peter says, he names two particular governmental leaders that God has done this with. He says, with the **king or to governors.** Now he's also named two of the methods that human governments use to keep order. He said that they **punish evil doers** and they **praise those who do right.** That's how they keep order. It's their job, instituted by God for a purpose.

So we have to understand that and understand that biblical context. God's design for government is the role that they have if we're going to understand what it means to **submit.** Now, what does submission not mean? Here's what it doesn't mean. It doesn't mean absolute allegiance. It doesn't mean blind obedience. It doesn't mean a passive approval of everything. That's not what it means to submit. When the Bible talks about submission, it always is talking between believers in human communities, about a willing submission that is done for a higher purpose. That's why Peter says, "**Submit for the Lord's sake.**" Built into the submission is an understanding that God has designed governments to serve a purpose in the world, to keep order, and that order is important in community.

Second, there's an understanding that every single person that is in leadership in government, that has the authority to lead in that way, is someone that is designed by God. And as people designed by God, they are designed in His image, and they are worthy of respect, not worthy of absolute obedience, but worthy of respect. So as we approach this topic, we have to keep God's view in mind and understand that God has granted governmental leaders and government authority. And we as His people are called to bear witness to His goodness and live as good citizens, agreeing with the general order in society, understanding God established government to set those rules of order. I understand it's a hard teaching, and please understand this is not a command to agree with every person in authority. Not at all! This is really an outworking, an illustration, an application of what Peter has already said. He said that that our **behavior is to be excellent among the Gentiles**, as we are out there.

So what does that look like in this larger political realm as we live as citizens of an earthly kingdom? Well, it looks like living as a good citizen. It looks like keeping God in mind and submitting to the order in society in order to bear witness to Him and demonstrate what life under Him frees us up to do. So let's stop and affirm two things. The first is that I understand this is very counter-cultural and even controversial in our world. "Peter said it, not me," is the first thing. I understand that. The second thing is, I think we can acknowledge that it sounds as though Peter is giving a free pass to governments, and it sounds like maybe he's even very pro-king, pro-government. Maybe he doesn't understand just how evil the people can be and the governments can be. Maybe Peter is naive.

But we need to affirm that Peter is not naive in the least. Peter completely understood the evil that could come from people in authority. When he was writing this letter, he was writing about a king, and referencing a king that was a tyrant, that was the leader of the charge to persecute Christians. This was Nero. Nero, the infamous one who would eventually kill both Paul and Peter. Peter was not naive. He understood the evil that can come from leaders in government, from kings and governors. He understood it perfectly. Peter wasn't naïve; I think Peter was full of faith, and he kept the bigger picture in mind. He was full of faith, and it requires great faith for us as people to live as citizens of the kingdom of God in the midst of world governments and world leaders that we know may even hate God. It requires great faith to continue to trust God in the midst of what feels like the chaos of an evil leader. It does. Peter understood that perfectly, but he lived with a grounded confidence that ultimately, at the end of the day, God was in charge, that there would be a day where there would be a reckoning. God would set everything right. That day was coming, and until that day, for Peter, living in the tension, faithfully meant that he kept the role that Christians had as bearing public witness and living for the mission of God as his primary concern. Peter wasn't pro king. He wasn't pro government. He was very pro gospel. He cared about the advancement of the kingdom, the advancement of the truth of God. That's where he turns next. As we get to verse 15:

For such (referring back to submission) is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men.

This returns us to this topic of behavior once again, this gospel-driven behavior, this gospel transformation of the inner person, such that we live differently as a demonstration, as a public witness. But not just that, but as a divine strategy for mission. See, God's very strategy is that He

would use our lives as good citizens, as people that live virtuously in the world, and in the midst of all the mess, that we would shine forth as different kinds of people. And he would use that, then, as a strategy to advance His very name, His very mission. And I will admit to you that there are times where I have to stop and go back and express my confidence, my faith, my trust in God's strategy, because there are times where I start to think, "Lord, I don't know if this works. I don't know if living well in the world is the most effective strategy. If I could form a strategy, it might be to move forward with force, and that would put me in alignment with all of Jesus' disciples."

That's the way we generally want to do things. You remember the disciples. They were constantly struggling with the idea that they knew Jesus was the best. He was the King. They knew that Rome was the invader. They were doing that which, ultimately, they were not supposed to do, taking God's land. And they wanted to get Jesus to the throne and kick Rome out. They wanted to have a kingdom party, and they wanted to have the reign of righteousness begin right now. That's what they wanted. You'll remember that Peter was in the garden when Jesus was about to be arrested. He grabbed a sword. He was ready, and he cut off the ear of Malchus...ready to go! I think Peter was constantly on edge, saying, "Let's go do this thing. Let's go take it, Jesus. We can get you there. Let me help you." But Jesus came in and reminded Peter that God's ways are different than man's ways. God has a different strategy. Jesus said to Pilate as he stood before him, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then my servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews. But as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm." God's strategies are not man's strategies. And there are times where we have to, again, double down on our confidence in God and His wisdom, and to move the kingdom forward with strategies that are divine, that are instituted by His wisdom and His power, not by "my" strength.

I think Peter, by the time he wrote this letter, had learned the lesson. He was the very one who said he would never deny Jesus. I think what he meant is, "I'll fight for you." He was ready to take the sword, but by the time he wrote this letter, he understood God's ways. And rather than the kingdom advancing by the sword, it advances by the will of God. And the will of God is that Christians would engage in what Peter calls doing good deeds, doing right, living in the world as kingdom citizens. And God would then, in turn, use that living to silence the ignorance of foolish men. People would look on; they would observe, and they would say, "I am in stunned silence. I can't believe the way these people are operating. It's alien to me. It's entirely different." And they'd wonder where the source of that living comes from. And ultimately, then we could say to them, "Well, it comes from God. That's why we live the way we do."

Witness and mission, these were foremost in Peter's mind, and he understood that witness and mission certainly comes with proclamations. We speak the mission; we speak the witness; we speak the truth. But he also is acknowledging we also show it. We show it by the very way that we live. We've been called to take up a public witness, to let the world know the will of God, the ways of God, even to demonstrate God's politics, how God organizes people by the very way that we live. As Peter continues here in verse 16, he echoes a sentiment that we spoke about last week. Last week we referred to how Paul says you are not your own. And here Peter echoes that same sentiment as we talk about this whole idea of submission. Verse 16:

Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but *use it* as bondslaves of God.

We are free. We have been set free. But just as last week, we talked about how our freedom doesn't mean we then indulge in the world, and we say everything is lawful in the same way Peter is saying, you are absolutely free. But don't use your freedom as an opportunity to indulge all the desires of your flesh and engage in evil. Rather, you've been set free to be a bondsman, a willing servant of the living God. As we live our public lives, as we step out into the broader world, out into the larger community, we do so as servants of the living God, demonstrating what He is like, acknowledging all the while that we are free from the penalty of sin, and we are also free to now live a different life. And, brothers and sisters, the church needs to know there is a different life available, because the way that the world is generally working in this whole conversation is, well, it's just broken. It's broken, and they need to see a better way. And so we, as free people, understand that we have been freed to live in service. We have been freed to demonstrate a different type of life. We've been freed to live for more, to embrace the very calling of God, the very strategies of God, to embrace our public witness and to live as servants in this public world, this political world.

As we come to verse 17, we arrive at four more commands. Peter gives four more commands, but they're commands that really encompass all of our public life, but they also are kind of shaped in a poetic form. It's an incredible statement of just how we are to operate in the world. He says:

Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king.

Honor all people. In a world marked by shame, in a world marked by condemnation, by dishonor, in a world where that is the most familiar posture, we as God's people, servants of the living God, citizens of a different kingdom, we honor all people. Now, please hear me. That doesn't mean we agree with all people. That doesn't mean we approve of all people; we affirm all people's decisions. But it does mean we give them respect. We honor them as people made in the image of God, and therefore people who deserve dignity. **Honor all people.** We treat them as image bearers, even though that image can't be born correctly because they aren't united to God. We still treat them with respect and honor all people; that will set us apart in the world. He continues.

Love the brotherhood. That's our primary community; that's us. We engage in the world at large, but this is our primary community, and we are called to live together well, to figure out how do we operate together? And there is going to be disagreement. Oh there's disagreement all the time in the church about big things, about little things. So the question is, as we live in this community and do our politics within this community, we must figure out how to live together well. How will we disagree? Will love be the mark of our disagreement? Will we seek what's good for one another so that we'll continue to live in unity? We won't break fellowship when we disagree. I believe the world is looking on at how the church functions together. Do we love one another? Do we disagree well?

Love the brotherhood. That will bear testimony to the watching world of the different type of community that we are as God's people. Then he says...

Fear God. Fear God; this covers everything. This is our primary allegiance. This is our primary identity. We are servants of the living God. Our fear of Him is something that supersedes, is bigger than, is more important than anything else in the world. And so this will mean that, at times, we need to acknowledge, mean that we don't submit, but we actually resist something that's being

asked of us. As we engage in the kingdoms of this world, there will be times where we'll be asked to do things that are contrary to what God wants. And at that point, our fear of God is primary. Our fear of God is the number one indicator. It's the number one identity that we have, and so therefore, out of fear of God, we will not submit. We'll actually subvert; we'll resist. Our fear of God is our primary identity; it's our common allegiance. Nothing is bigger than that for us. Our fear of God, our worship of Him, our awe of Him, sets the tone for our way of behaving in the world. Most of the time, I believe in society that is going to mean that we can freely submit. Sometimes that's going to mean we have to resist, because we love God too much. Nothing is more important than our fear of Him. That shapes everything...shapes the way we engage, even with the king. He says,

Honor the king. We fear God. We honor the king. Our honor of the king, our respect for the king, even our submission to some of the things that a king says, never is more important, never supersedes our fear of God. Our fear of God determines everything. But we can be people who live as good citizens, who seek to submit, who seek to honor the king and respect a king or a leader, a mayor, or someone who has been given a role and someone who has been made in the image of God, deserving of our honor. I don't think there's any question this political conversation is broken, broken in our world. It's messy, ugly. I don't see any indication that it is going to get any better. Do you? It's not going to get any better. Now, some people and some churches throughout history, up until this current day, have looked at that and looked at how messy it is and said, "The best thing we can do is just get out of all of it, separate ourselves, not engage." I just want to say I don't think that is what it looks like to faithfully live in the tension. The other thing I'd say about that strategy is that it removes God's people from the public sphere within which we are called to live as public witnesses, and to bear the mission of God publicly. So the question is, how do we engage?

The first thing I want to say is, I want to appeal to you to not give into the temptation to become cynical. In this moment, it's so easy to become cynical. Don't become cynical. Believe that God has purposes. He is doing something in our world, and even though there's so much disagreement in our world, that sets the environment, that sets the context for incredible opportunity. It's an opportunity for us as believers, as servants of the living God, called to be public witnesses, living on mission, to step into this conversation and to do it differently and to demonstrate what God is like.

What would it be like if Christians entered the room in the midst of political conversation and the room said, "Oh, thank goodness they're here. They operate differently. There's something different about them. They honor others. They fear God. We don't agree with them on everything, but they honor others." Now, practically, this is going to look different for every single person. As we close, I want to do what we did a few weeks ago on the topic of technology and just ask a few questions. I want to ask questions that aren't prescriptive, because I don't believe that prescribing something that we all need to do is a good idea on something like this. Rather, I think each one of us has a responsibility under God, as disciples of Jesus, to go to Him and say, "What should it look like for me to engage in the world? How are you calling me to bear witness in my world? Are you calling me to get more involved in things, or less involved in things? Lord, I'm taking my cues from You."

Each of us has a responsibility to do that, but these general questions could help diagnose where our mind is on this whole conversation. So the first question is very general and goes back to the first verse we looked at this morning:

“Have you embraced, as a disciple of Jesus, your identity as an alien and a stranger in the world? That is foundational to everything. Do you live understanding that your primary identity is that you are a citizen of the kingdom of God?” That's primary and leads to the second question:

“Have you embraced the call to live as a public witness, to be engaged in the mission of God in your world, wherever He puts you, demonstrating to the world what God is like and the change that He can bring about in their lives because your change is on display? If you embrace the call to be a missionary in your world, essentially God's intent for us is that we would be public witnesses. He wants to use our lives as His divine strategy for advancing His name. Have you embraced it? Final question:

If you are already engaged—I know many people in this church are very engaged in this conversation—so my question is, “Just as you engage, does your manner, does your method, does your attitude, does it align with the world and its methods or with God and His methods...something ultimately only you and God can sort out?” But as we engage in the world, we're to do so as witnesses, demonstrating just what God is like to a weary world.

I began by saying, “What does being a disciple of Jesus have to do with politics?” My answer is, “Everything!” and really every time we gather, we might not be totally aware of it, but we're making these political proclamations all the time. We've done it this morning. We're going to do it in just a few minutes when we gather together and sing as we are about to do, that “*Jesus' name is higher than every name, and that His name is higher than every throne and every dominion.*” That is an incredibly political statement. Jesus is King! All the leaders of the world might not know it, but He's in charge. It would be best if they took notice, but we proclaim it, even though in His wisdom, He has allowed that reality to be hidden for now. Every time we gather, we proclaim it is true. He is King. He is in charge. His will, will be done when the final day—when it's all said and done—and in that day, every knee will bow. We proclaim it; we live it. That day is coming. It hasn't yet arrived. And so as we await, as we live in the tensions of being citizens of *that* kingdom, in the midst of *these* kingdoms, let us be a people who faithfully navigate that tension, who live according to the very power of God, to live as public witnesses on mission in a weary world that longs to find relief that only God can provide. Let's pray these things together.

Our Father, we do acknowledge that You, You are the One. You are the only One that can resolve all the problems that we have in the world. And we know that in that final day, You will do just that. You will set everything right. There will be a reckoning, and You will be rightfully praised as the only One worthy of praise, Lord Jesus, we acknowledge You as king. We are Your people, citizens of Your kingdom, and although the world doesn't know it, we pray that You will empower us to boldly live as citizens of Your kingdom out in our world, that we might bear public witness to the goodness of Your reign, that many might see and observe and ask questions, and ultimately turn to give You glory, because You're the only one worthy of it. So, Lord, we ask for Your help, and we pray these things in Your name, Amen.

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