

TITLE: HOW TO INFLUENCE PEOPLE (Behavior toward non-Christians)

TEXT: 1 PETER 2:11-25

THESIS: To stress the Christian's responsibilities in our behavior towards non-Christians

INTRO: Many books have been written on the subject of "how to influence people" (e.g., Dale Carnegie's book, How to Win Friends & Influence People). *God's* book on how to influence people is found in our text this morning.

I. BEHAVIOR TOWARD NON-CHRISTIANS IN GENERAL (v. 11-12):

- A. (v. 11) *Beloved, I beseech you* (urge, admonish) *as strangers & pilgrims* (resident foreigner, stranger in a foreign land)
- B. *Abstain from fleshly lusts* (inordinate desires) *that war against the soul* (same word as in 2 Cor 10:3 & 1 Tim 1:18 – "war a good warfare"). The same word is used for both sides (participants) of the battle. **This is a war!** Failure to recognize this fact is the key ingredient in the recipe for loss!
 - 1. This is Satan's arsenal – fleshly lusts! For him to win, you must give in to one or more of them.
 - 2. E.g., 1) a woman in scant clothing, 2) a beer, 3) an opportunity to blow your top, 4) jealousy/covetousness/idolatry (Col 3:5)
 - 3. You must abstain! Just say no! Satan's weapons can't wound you without *your* approval!
- C. (v. 12a) *Having your conversation* (behaving) *honest* (good, virtuous) *among the Gentiles* (nations; non-Christians)
- D. (v. 12b) Why do this? **Influence! Reputation!**
 - 1. The non-Christians Jews were well known for their sanctimony (Mt 6, 23) as well as their persecution of the church. The Gentiles were known for their idolatry. **Christians** didn't want to be confused with *either*! When Peter was writing, the Roman world assumed that Christians were a sect of Judaism. **Christians had to be careful NOT to be confused with other groups like Judaism!** Their behavior had to be good/proper.
 - 2. *By your good works, which they will have beheld, they'll glorify God.* **This is our goal...to glorify God!** Regardless of what non-Christians say about us, our good works will vindicate us, and cause them to glorify God (3:16; 4:14; Mt 5:16).
 - 3. *In the day of visitation*—the word means "inspect" or "oversee," & can be positive (grace/salvation) or negative (punishment)

II. BEHAVIOR TOWARDS SECULAR LEADERS (v. 13-17):

- A. One of the big ways Christians can stand out is in their obedience to the government /laws (Rom 13:1-7).
- B. *Submit* ('to arrange under', subordinate, obey) *to every ordinance of man because of the Lord* (because the Lord commands it)
 - 1. To the king, as supreme (highest) – the federal government! Or to governors, the kings assistants.
 - 2. Obey the laws of the land. Pay our taxes. Obey speed limits! Be honest in *all* our dealings.
 - 3. Their purpose is to punish the bad and reward the good (Rom 13:4-5).
 - 4. *If man's ordinances and God's ordinances contradict, "we must obey God rather than men" (Acts 4:19 & 5:29).
- C. (v. 15-16) With this submission, we fulfill God's will – *that we may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.*
 - 1. Well doing = having a good conversation (v. 12) = submitting to human ordinances (v. 13)
 - 2. Because of their ignorance (lack of knowledge), foolish (mindless) men speak against Christians.
 - a. They are atheists, or may claim to believe in God, but don't know God's Word. So they speak against us & hate us.
 - b. Our attempts to explain the Bible to them won't shut them up. *But our good conduct takes away their complaints!
 - 3. (v. 16) As free (John 8:36 – the Son makes us free indeed); free from the law and from slavery to sin; but servants of God! Take *my* yoke and learn of me...ye shall find rest (Mt 11:29-30).
- D. (v. 17) Summary of our responsibilities in society: Honor all men (value everyone); Love the church; Fear God (obey Him in all points); Honor the king. If you do these things, you'll have peace in this life (as much as a Christian can have)!

III. BEHAVIOR TOWARDS SUPERIORS (v. 18-20):

- A. (v. 18) *Servants, be subject to* (same as in v. 13; 3:1,5,22; 5:5) *your masters*, regardless of the kind of master he is! Rebellion is *not* going to benefit you! Paul sent Onesimus back to Philemon. Again, this is about a Christian's influence & reputation.
- B. (v. 19-20) What is acceptable to God? When a Christian suffers wrongfully, *"this is grace."*
 - 1. Why should you expect acknowledgment for patiently taking punishment for something you've done wrong? Prisoners are rewarded for good behavior! They *should* have proper behavior...after all, they're being punished for their crimes.
 - 2. But what about being punished for doing the *right* thing?!? This is Christianity in a non-Christian world!
- C. We aren't servants or slaves today, but this teaching can easily apply to any subordinate/superior relationship.
 - Those in the *military*; those who have a *boss* at work; a student with the *teacher*.

IV. CHRIST'S EXAMPLE (v. 21-25)

- A. *Christ also suffered **for us**, leaving us an example...* How do we **not** fight back? How can we allow ourselves to suffer like this?
- B. *When someone treats you this way (as a superior, etc. – v. 18-20), think about Christ's example.
 - 1. He suffered **much more** than we suffer (can't even make the comparison)
 - 2. Plus, He suffered **for us**! He endured the cross (& all the preceding events) because of our sins. Follow his example! He did this so we would be dead to sin and live unto righteousness (v. 24)!
- C. (v. 23) He was reviled ('heap abuse upon'), but didn't revile back!
 - 1. Imagine a playground fight: it always starts with the talking...insults...and you're a loser if you don't 'revile' back.
 - 2. Next there is pushing and hitting. Jesus, *when he suffered, threatened not*. Don't hit back!
 - 3. Can you imagine your favorite 'fighter' allowing himself to get beat up, without even trying to fight back? It's one thing to picture a wimp in this situation, but what about someone who you know could win this fight if he wanted to?!
***Christ was God!** Think about the dominant, ominous image of the Almighty God in the OT, and the punishment He inflicted on those who disobeyed Him.
- D. (v. 24) Again, here is *how* not to fight back...by remembering the example of Jesus.
 - 1. **He did it for us!** This ought to be the ultimate motivation for us.
 - 2. Being dead to our past sins, we should live unto righteousness.
- E. (v. 25) Don't forget your previous state: lost sheep! But now are returned to your Shepherd (feeder) and bishop (overseer).

CONCLUSION: Do we suffer wrongfully today as Christian? Although nothing as brutal (yet) as what the early Christians faced, we deal with individuals every day who think Christianity is stupid & a waste of time. Our government hates Christians, won't allow us to pray publicly, continually subjects us to things and people who are blatantly ungodly, tries in every way to remove any semblance of God from our society; all the while bending over backwards to accommodate Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, atheists, or any other religious group other than Christians! What can we do about it?

Here God says to submit to every ordinance of man (again, as long as it doesn't contradict God). The message of this passage is that, by our good behavior, these anti-God people, though they may never change, will nonetheless have *nothing* evil to say against us...they'll be ashamed (3:16). We can still, as Christians, stand up for what's right. But we can do it in a gentle way, in good Christian behavior, that doesn't jeopardize our good reputation among non-Christians.