

## Series: Faith Under Fire

### “Walking As A Witness”

#### 1 Peter 2:11-17

Today we continue in a sermon series called “Faith Under Fire.” Every person here today understands that we live in an imperfect world. We see this in many ways, but one of the clearest ways that we quickly observe this is through the trials that we face in this world. **James 1:2** commands, “Consider it all joy, my brethren, **when** you encounter various trials.” This verse teaches us that trials will come into every one of our lives. The trials may be different and multi-faceted, yet we can be assured that we will all face them. We see this all throughout our world today. At any moment it seems that half of us are going through a trial and the other half is awaiting the next trial. Trials are a part of life for all people.

The question that we are answering is simply this, “What am I to do when my faith is under fire? What am I to do when I am going through trials and difficulties? What am I to do when my faith is tested? What am I to do when it feels like my world is falling apart?”

Over the past three weeks, we’ve learned three keys to living when our faith is under fire. First, as Christians we have the opportunity and the calling to **walk in hope**. As a child of God, no matter what I face in this world it can’t diminish or take away what God has done for me, is doing in me, and will fulfill through me in the future. Because of God’s grace and mercy, I have complete confidence that heaven is my home. This confidence gives me living hope as I live in this fallen world today. So, the first key is that we must walk in hope. Second, we discovered that we must **walk in holiness**. Remember the believers of Peter’s day were going through intense persecution at the hands of Nero. Many were wondering how they were to live in a foreign land and how they were to live amidst such a difficult situation. Peter directed them to live in holiness. Peter clearly wanted them to know that their focus wasn’t to be on where they might reside. Instead, they should focus on Who they had a relationship with. It didn’t matter where they lived or what they left behind. What mattered most was that God loved them, was with them, and was calling them to holiness. The third key we discovered when facing trials is that we are to **walk in harmony** with the Lord and with others. Because we have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus and have been adopted into His family, we must continually love the Lord and other believers. Both our love for the Lord and for others is greatly tested in times of trial. Last week we saw that we are also to **walk in confidence**. This confidence is not in ourselves, our looks, skills, abilities, smarts, etc. It is confidence that we have in the Lord. We can have confidence because of Who He is and how He is working in and through our lives. Today we learn a fifth key element to our walk.

#### Read Text

The title to the message may seem a little out of place when we read this text. Nowhere in the passage do we read the word “witness”. A “witness” is someone who shares what they have seen and heard. In these verses we have not read a single line about someone sharing what they’ve

seen or heard. As always, to understand these verses we must look at the context. We ended last week's message with the reminder of our calling as Christians. **Verse 9** clarifies, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, **so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.**" This phrase literally means that we are to tell out or advertise aloud the praises of God. We must not be silent, quiet, or ashamed. We must tell others of the amazing grace of God that forgave us, cleansed us, and changed us. There are some in our day today who will say, "Well, I don't tell people about my faith, I just live it." Friend, I praise God that you live it. However, part of living it is that you share it. We must remember at all times that "Faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the Word of Christ," **Romans 10:17**. We must be faithful to share the good news of the Gospel with others. However, as we are sharing the Gospel with others we must be careful that our walk matches our talk. These verses that we are looking at today show this clearly. Please understand that I am not saying you can be a clear witness without words. However, I do believe that many of our professions of Christ are hindered because our works don't back up our words. Much of our claims of Christ are rejected because of our conduct. And I believe that God is calling us to walk as a consistent witness for Him. In other words, our walk should back up our talk. I believe in these verses God tells us three ways that we can accomplish this. I have listed them as commands because these verses present three specific commands:

### **I. Be Separate in Your Lifestyle (vs. 11-12)**

As a Christian, I am called to be separate in my lifestyle. This doesn't mean that I am to be separated from the world, but it does mean that I am to live differently than the world around me. I am called to be in the world but not of the world. There are some through the centuries that have tried to completely separate themselves entirely from the world. They have sold their possessions, moved out to the wilderness or the mountains, and isolated themselves from everyone. However, that is not what God calls us to do. Paul's letters clarify this for us. In **1 Corinthians 5:9-10** Paul is giving instruction about how to address a so-called Christian who is openly sinning. As he gives instruction he says, "I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world." In other words, as you are living in this world it is inevitable that you are going to be around all sorts of people. In fact, not only are we in this world, Jesus Himself called us to go into the world and make disciples by baptizing them and teaching them everything that He commanded. Being separate from the world doesn't mean that we literally have to separate from it. It means that in our conduct and our actions we should be distinct from the world. We are to be in the world but not of the world. The world around us should, by our words and actions, see a clear difference. Verses 11-12 lay out several keys to accomplishing this:

#### **A. We Must be Attentive to Our Goal (vs. 11a)**

I want to remind you that this instruction is for those who are identified as "believers". Here Peter calls us "beloved". The same word that God the Father used to describe His only begotten Son is the same word He uses to describe those who are adopted into His

family through faith in Jesus. Because we are beloved by God and belong to Him, He calls us to live as “aliens and strangers”. These terms sound odd to us, but it is a powerful picture of how we are to live this life. An alien is one who is living in an unfamiliar land. Their environment is foreign and strange. The idea of a “stranger” is of a traveler who is on a journey and is temporarily passing through. An alien would not try to become comfortable in a new area because they would realize this wasn’t their home. A stranger would not put down roots and get too settled because they were continually on the move from one place to another. To an extent, this goes against the old-school American culture and definitely against the mindset of the deep south. The problem with much of that mindset is that it is based upon my happiness and enjoyment. When I buy into that ideal, then my comforts and enjoyments become more important than God’s will. God wants us to realize that this world is not our home, we are simply just passing through. Our citizenship, our home, is in heaven. We were made to know Him, love Him, worship Him, and one day we will spend eternity with Him. The focus of our life has a dramatic impact on how we live our lives today. **\*\*ILL:** I had to come to grips with this first-hand when God called us here. I learned quickly that if we live our lives for the mere pleasure of the moment we will give into many comforts, distractions, and temptations. However, when we live our lives in light of where we’re going and Who we will be with, it will empower us to live differently than the world. **Hebrews 12:1b-2**, “Let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of God.” Remember, Jesus is our goal. We must fix our attention on Him and not on the temporary things of this world. And doing so empowers us to live differently.

## **B. We Must be Active in the Battle (vs. 11b)**

Peter causes us to recognize something that many may either ignore or may simply be unaware of. As Christians, we are soldiers who are fighting a spiritual battle. In case you think my verbiage is strong, notice the words that Peter used in verse 11. He said they “wage war against the soul.” The word for “war” was the word that was used to describe a military campaign. Because we are in a war, we need to be constantly active in the battle. We can’t afford to take a day off. This battle demands our constant attention.

Peter says strongly that our fleshly sinful desires war against us. Warren Wiersbe said it simply, “Our real battle is not with people around us, but passions within us.” The great preacher D.L. Moody said it well, “I have more trouble with D.L. Moody than with any man I know.” We are all human and, as such, we each have fleshly lusts that war against us. Peter says, “Abstain from these lusts.” The word “abstain” means “to hold oneself from”. These “fleshly lusts” refer to the sensual side of our nature that craves or desires things that are not pleasing to God. When you and I trust Christ for salvation, we are given a new nature and are made a brand-new creation. This doesn’t mean that we become perfect, but it does mean that we have a new Lord, have experienced a new birth,

and therefore have new desires. However, there is a problem that exists because we still live in this flesh and our old nature still desires those things that are not of God. It is these things that Peter is saying to do away with.

I am convinced that the church today needs to hear this message. God does not call us to live however we want. He saves us and calls us to live for Him. He gives us His Word as a letter written to us to guide us, equip us, and instruct us how to live. The world around us doesn't care about God's Word. Satan has his own agenda that he strives to accomplish through the world. Much of what our world today condones and justifies is a sin against God. In fact, much of what the world has to offer is a perversion of what God has given as a gift. For example, God has given sex as a wonderful gift for both pleasure and procreation. It is meant to be a beautiful gift that brings fulfillment and joy to the marriage relationship only. However, with the pressures of our culture, the compromises of the masses, and the temptations of our flesh, many so-called Christians have completely abandoned God's plan for this gift. They have replaced God's beautiful gift with cheap substitutes. The lure of pornography paints a picture, a mindset, of what it must be like. Many unsuspecting people see the lure of the images. They don't realize that it is all a trap of the enemy. They don't realize that it is all a lie. It is fool's gold. They don't realize where it can lead them. They have no idea how these so-called innocent images can destroy their mind and ruin healthy relationships. Additionally, our culture not only condones but encourages and even laughs at sex outside of marriage. Even in the church today many take it lightly. In a recent poll by Josh McDowell he learned that the majority of young adults in the church don't see premarital sex as a sin, but more than half of them surveyed said that it was a sin to not care properly for the environment by recycling. This culture has become accustomed to cheap thrills, quick fixes, and casual hookups, which are all a perversion of what God considers holy and sacred. Listen to Paul's instruction from **1 Corinthians 6:15-18**, "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take away the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? May it never be! Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a prostitute is one body with her? For He says, 'The two shall become one flesh.' But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him. **FLEE IMMORALITY.** Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body." In other words, what seems like a thrill at the moment actually causes great harm to those who give in to its lie. By giving in to this temptation they sin against their own bodies, their own minds, heart, and emotions. You can't participate in these things without causing harm both to you and to future relationships and ultimately your relationship with God. Paul concluded in **verse 19**, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own?" Please understand that this illustration is one of many. We could instead talk about drugs, alcohol abuse, and any number of things. But please understand my motive. God desires that you have life. These lures of the world are a lie. They promise life, but they actually destroy. **James 1:14-16** warns, "But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust

has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.”

If you are struggling with any of these things, I encourage you to remember the promise of **1 John 1:9**, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Jesus came to give His life for you so that you would be forgiven, cleansed, and set free from the power of sin over your life today. God can restore you and give you a bright future, but you must repent and turn to Him.

Because we can be freed from sin, Peter is saying that we must make the intentional, deliberate choice to turn from the desires and cravings that we know don’t please God. You might be thinking, “Pastor, that’s impossible.” It is impossible if you don’t know Jesus and have the Holy Spirit leading you. However, if you know Jesus and are filled with the Spirit, it is possible to not feed these lusts. **Galatians 5:16**, “But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.” **Romans 6:12-14**, “Do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace.”

### **C. We Must be Above Reproach (vs. 12)**

Peter says, “Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles.” The word for “Gentiles” here is not referring to a specific people group. He is referring to all unbelievers as Gentiles. So, he is telling us to keep a close watch and guard our actions among the unsaved. Why? **Because the world speaks against all who don’t abide by their way.** In Peter’s day that was certainly true. The Christians were being accused of all sorts of things, including setting fire to the city of Rome. The Christians were lied about and maligned in every way you can imagine. **We should also be above reproach because the world is watching how we live.** Whether we like it or not, the unsaved world around is watching us and looking for any and all excuses to reject the Gospel. Wiersbe said it well, “We must back up our talk with our walk. There should be nothing in our conduct that will give the unsaved ammunition to attack Christ and the Gospel. Our good works must back up our good words.” In other words, we must practice what we preach.

Brothers and sisters, the world is watching us. Yes, they may speak poorly of us. Yes, they may mock and ridicule. But they are still watching. **\*\*ILL:** In the summer of 1805, a number of Indian chiefs and warriors met in a council at Buffalo Creek, New York to hear a presentation of the Christian message by Mr. Cram from the Boston Missionary Society. After the sermon, a response was given by one of the leading chiefs known as Red Jacket. The chief approached the missionary with a serious thought to ponder. He stated, “Sir, you say that there is but one way to worship and serve the Great God. If there is but one religion, why do you white people differ so much about it? Why not all agree, as you can all read the Book? Sir, we are told that you have been preaching to the white

people in this place. These people are our neighbors. We are acquainted with them. We will wait a little while and see what effect your preaching has on them. If we find it does them good, makes them honest and less disposed to cheat then we will consider again what you have said.” There are many more like the Indian chief. There are many who are waiting to see the change of Christ in and through our lives.

Friend, when we live our lives in this way it is amazing to see how God uses that to convict people of sin and draw them to Himself. God calls it the “day of visitation”. We must show and share the love of Christ so that when God visits them, they will glorify Him. We are to do good not for the purpose of our own glory, but to the glory of God. The question for each of us to consider is this: When the day of visitation comes for them, has our witness to them been clear and our lifestyle been consistent so that they know the truth about Jesus?

The first key to walking as a witness is to live like a citizen of heaven and live differently than the world around us. Then we turn our attention to our citizenship here.

## **II. Be Submissive to Leadership (vs. 13-15)**

Remember, the emphasis here is that our actions impact our witness for Christ. Yes, heaven is our real home and we are only temporarily passing through this world. However, God doesn’t leave us without instructions. In these verses God gives us His order for the government, for the home, for the workplace, and even for the church. Concerning the government, while we live in this world God shows us that we are to respect its leaders and follow its orders. Our role here is clear - we are to submit. We will see this word a lot over the next few weeks because it is a major theme in these passages. We don’t like this word. It is the other “s” word that people would rather not say. The word means “to arrange under”. The word was a military term that referred to the rank and file of a group of soldiers. It does not mean that one person is less in value or importance than another. It simply means that God has given an order to things and His order must be followed so that there is health. In the illustration of a soldier, there are certainly times that a soldier might not like the orders he is given, or he may disagree altogether, but he still practices obedience. The same should be true of us. As Christians, we should submit to the authority that exists in human government because it has been ordained by God. **Romans 13:1-2**, “Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.” We see the same truths presented in **Titus 3:1-8**.

At this point many like to say, “But what about times of civil disobedience?” There are several references in the Bible where kings and leaders commanded Christians to do something that was directly opposed to God’s Word. In those cases, of course, it is better to obey God rather than man. Those times, though, are the rarity. But even in those cases such as Daniel, Rack, Shack and Benny, Peter, etc. they still continually showed honor and respect. We should still do the same. The basic rule here is that we must respect and submit to our leaders and our laws because they have been established by God.

### **A. The Motive of Our Submission (vs. 13, 15)**

You may be sitting there this morning thinking, “But, pastor, isn’t there a better way for me to be a witness for Christ? I don’t like the governor or the president? Why should I submit?” We see one primary reason listed in **verse 15**, “For such is the will of God.” In other words, this is a part of God’s plan for our good and His glory. Consider for a moment all the ways that we have seen the Lord at work in our lives. There have been many things along the way that we didn’t fully grasp or understand, yet each time He has faithfully worked in our lives. Think for a moment about how He has sovereignly worked things together for our good. Over and over He has shown us that His plan is for our good. He tells us to submit to our leaders and we should be willing to simply trust Him and obey. But notice clearly, what is the proper motive for submission? Verse 13 answers that we should submit to authority for “for the Lord’s sake.” We may not understand every detail, but for the Lord’s sake we must submit to our leaders. After all, isn’t this clearly what Jesus did? **\*\*ILL:** Have you taken time to think about how Jesus responded to the leaders of His day? When being tested by the Pharisees about taxes, He made it extremely clear that even the Jews were to give to Caesar what belonged to Caesar (because he was the appointed authority of the land) and give to God what belongs to God (because He has absolute authority). To Pilate, He announced that the power He had been given was from God His Father, yet not once did He disrespect or dishonor the leader. In fact, even when He could have done so, He remained silent because He knew that His life had a greater purpose than arguing and making a fool of Pilate. Jesus started no revolts, led no crusades, and started no riots. He loved people, submitted to the leaders, and went about doing good. Jesus set the example for us to follow in every matter of life, including how to treat our leaders. So, when we do something in the will of God and as the servants of God, then we are doing it for the Lord’s sake. It is God’s will that we do these things and we should obey these commands simply because we know it is.

### **B. The Magnitude of Our Submission (vs. 13)**

We should not only submit, but we should submit to “every human institution.” This is a hard pill to swallow at times. The idea here of “every institution” is referring to every leader and every law. Again, with the exception of being forced to disobey God’s clear Word or go against our convictions, we are called to submit and obey. Think of the leaders that we read about in Jesus’ day. Many of them were corrupt, unfair, incompetent, biased, and complete liars. They were boastful and arrogant, looking out only for themselves. But what does God say, “Submit to every institution.” By the way, don’t forget what was going on when Peter penned these words. Nero was in charge of Rome and he was unleashing all sorts of persecution on the church. But even then, God called the believers to submit because government is an institution of God and a country’s laws must be obeyed for the good of all. The clear implication is that believers are to show respect unto the offices because they are ordained by God. He obviously wasn’t telling believers to compromise their consciences because it was also Peter who said in **Acts**

**5:29**, “We must obey God rather than men.” But, in aspects of daily life, it was and is possible and desirable for all Christians to live according to the law of their land and we must strive to do so in everything.

### **C. The Message of Our Submission (vs. 15)**

This is an interesting point to consider. When we understand the will of God in our government and submit accordingly, it has a powerful impact. In other words, when we trust God that His will is right and obey Him, God goes to work. Notice verse 15, “By doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men.” **Titus 2:7-8 confirms**, “In all things show yourself to be an example of good deeds, with purity in doctrine, dignified, sound in speech which is beyond reproach, so that the opponent will be put to shame, having nothing bad to say about us.” The word for “silence” that Peter used means “to muzzle”. Peter is referring to the fact that the unsaved world may mock, ridicule, slander, and persecute. However, when we live good lives, exemplary lives in our personal conduct and in practical cooperation with the leaders that God gives us, then we live in such a way that our critics are hushed. This passage causes me to remember Paul’s exhortation in **Philippians 2:14-15**, “Do all things without grumbling or disputing; so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among who you appear as lights in the world.” When we submit to our leaders for the Lord’s sake and obey without grumbling or disputing, it is a powerful witness to the lost which silences their slander and causes them to take notice.

### **III. Be Serving the Lord (vs. 16-17)**

Don’t forget the context. With our mouths, we are to be declaring aloud the excellencies of God, from person to person and place to place. However, we must be intentional to make sure that our conduct matches our conversation. And in that conduct we must be separate in our lifestyle, we must submit to our leadership, and finally we must be serving the Lord.

Peter says that we are to live and act as “free men.” He is speaking of our freedom. We live in a church culture today that is very much focused on our freedom in Christ. We will say things like, “We have liberty in Christ.” This statement is true for every believer. However, the focus of our statement is usually way off-base and different than the statement was originally intended. Many times when we refer to our liberty in Christ we use it as a license to do what we want to do. We might say, “Well, I have freedom in Christ to do this or that, and I want to do this or that, so I will just do it.” That situation shows that we are using the liberty we have in Christ in a self-focused way. But, that isn’t what liberty in Christ is all about. Notice verse 16. How are we to use our freedom? “Use it as bondslaves of God.” The picture here is of those who are willing servants of God. In other words, we do have freedom in Christ, but our freedom is not for ourselves and our rights. Our freedom in Christ has been given for the glory of God and the good of others. In fact, if we don’t use our freedom as servants of God, then we may very likely destroy others and turn them away from Christ. Paul said it well in **1 Corinthians 8:9, 11-13**, “But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the



weak...For through your knowledge he who is weak is RUINED, the brother for whose sake Christ died. And so, by sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ.” Paul then concludes, “Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to stumble.” In Paul’s day, he was dealing with the offense of meat that was offered to idols. But, his point is clear. We have liberty in Christ, but we never are at liberty to offend a weaker brother or sister in Christ. In fact, doing so is a sin against them and against Christ Himself. Our freedom in Christ should be a means of us serving others, not ruining others. Our liberty must be used as a tool to build and edify, not as a weapon to fight and tear down with. John Phillips described, “This does not mean that we are free to do whatever we want. It means that He has set us free to be His devoted and willing slaves, to do what He wants. Sons though we are, we are His servants too. As such, we live to do His will.” The Apostle Paul summarized it in **Galatians 5:13**, “For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.”

#### **A. We Must Regard Those Around Us (vs. 17)**

We are to regard those outside of the body of Christ. This literally means that we are to be considerate of and honor all people. It makes no difference where we are. What matters is Whose we are, and because we belong to Him we must show care and concern for all. While at times we don’t agree with people’s actions, lifestyle, practices, politics, choices, etc., we can still love them through Jesus and treat them as real people with real needs. We are to recognize that no one is beyond the reach of His grace.

We are also to regard those inside the body of Christ. Specifically, we are to love the brotherhood. This is referring to the “agape” love that I spoke of two weeks ago.

#### **B. We Must Regard Those Above Us (vs. 17)**

We are to have great reverence for God. Having a reverential fear of God causes us to live a life where our walk matches our talk.

We must also regard our earthly rulers – kings, presidents, governors, mayors, etc. Even if they aren’t honorable, we must show them honor. Even if they aren’t respectable, we must respect the position.

It is worth noting in each of these four actions that the tense of these Greek verbs shows continual, ongoing action. This means that this isn’t to be a one-time situation. We are to continually honor all people, continually love the brotherhood, continually have reverence for God, and continually submit to our leaders. At times this will be difficult. At times, because of the desires of our own flesh, it may even seem impossible. But I want to remind you that by the power of God we can and must obey Him. I also want to remind you that the world is watching and they are longing to see if what we say we have is real. Let’s be sure as we walk through the trials to walk as a bold and clear witness for Jesus Christ.