



The Culture of Respect (1 Peter 2:11-17)

One of the most difficult challenges for Christians in the modern era is the politicizing of biblical topics related to morality. This is especially true of volatile social issues such as abortion and homosexuality, which stir deep emotions in many people, and have become the front lines of a distracting and undesirable cultural war. In the public forum, Christians are defined by these issues, and often characterized as hateful, arrogant people.

Several so-called Christians made hateful comments and threats of violence in a blog on the removal of the Ten Commandments from public places. One person responded, *"The Christian faith is rooted in violence and intolerance... ask any true Christian and they will tell you they are not of this earth so why should they care about it or anyone on it. Man, I feel sorry for the Christians."* This characterization of Christians is not uncommon, and unfortunately, not completely undeserved. Some well-meaning Christians have fought so hard for biblical principles in government and society, that the gospel of Jesus Christ has taken a back seat to the relentless pursuit of moral issues. The tragic result has been the public association of political agendas with evangelical Christianity, which has unnecessarily fueled even more distrust and bad feelings toward Christians.

What should we do? Stop caring about issues important to us? The answer is found here in 1 Peter 2. We are instructed to live properly among our neighbors, demonstrate honorable behavior, and respect everyone. We are to cultivate a culture of respect. We want to be respected, we want to be taken seriously, we want to point people to God - therefore we must show respect to others. When we show respect, we gain credibility and permission to have a voice in society and be a catalyst for change. It is, in fact, what God calls us to do.

Respectful thinking and respectful behavior demonstrate Christian love and create a bridge to others, even those we disagree with. Misplaced activism and careless rhetoric do nothing but damage the cause of Christ. Respectful behavior requires spiritual maturity, a clear understanding of the Bible, and the help of the Holy Spirit. Francis Schaeffer, a Christian theologian, said that we must to come to a place where *"true Christians can exhibit in practice a fidelity to the holiness of God and yet simultaneously exhibit in practice a fidelity to the love of God before a watching world"*.

Another well know Francis, St Francis of Assisi, said, *"Preach the Gospel at all times and when necessary use words."* This is a powerful reminder of the importance of a life well lived. *Your life is a witness, how will you live it? Will people give honor to God because of the quality of our lives, or will they dishonor God because we are obsessed with political agendas?* At some level, negative attitudes toward Christians will always exist, we are involved in spiritual warfare. However, spiritual warfare should not become cultural warfare. If we cultivate a culture of respect, *"they will see your honorable behavior and give honor to God"*. - DJS

