

Godly Living

Scripture: 1 Peter 2:11–12

Code: 60-23

INTRODUCTION

A. The Need for Godliness

The believers whom Peter wrote to were facing severe persecution. That persecution included slander and false accusations. The believers needed to know how to handle such a situation.

1. A Key Passage

In response Peter wrote, "Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul. Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may on account of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.

"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. For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men. Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God. Honor all men; love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king.

"Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable. For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a man bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God" (1 Pet. 2:11-20).

2. A Key Phrase

The key phrase of that entire passage is in verse 15: "By doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men." The Greek term translated "silence" (phimo[ma]o) pictures muzzling an animal. It speaks of silencing an adversary by disproving his accusations. The accusations come from "the ignorance of foolish men." Their criticism against God's people is both ignorant and foolish. The way of silencing their unfounded criticism is "by doing right." Doing right means living a godly life. That's the believer's most effective tool for evangelism.

Our conduct is not only the critic's greatest point of attack, but also our greatest point of vulnerability. Scandalous conduct fuels the fires of criticism, but godly living extinguishes them. Commentator Robert Leighton wrote, "When a Christian walks irreprovably, his enemies have no where to fasten their teeth on him, but are forced to gnaw their own malignant tongues. As it secures the godly, thus to stop the lying mouths of foolish men, so it is as painful to them to be thus stopped, as muzzling is to beasts, and it punishes their malice. And this is a wise Christian's way, instead of impatiently fretting at the mistakes or wilful miscensures of men, to keep still on his calm temper of mind, and upright course of life, and silent innocence; this, as a rock, breaks the waves into foam that roar about it" (Commentary on First Peter [Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1972 reprint], p. 195).

One skeptic offered this challenge to Christians: "Show me your redeemed life and I'll be inclined to believe in your Redeemer." The great Scottish preacher Alexander MacLaren said, "The world takes its notions of God, most of all, from the people who say that they belong to God's family. They read us a great deal more than they read the Bible. They see us; they only hear about Jesus Christ" (First and Second Peter and First John [N.Y.: Eaton and Maines, 1910], p. 105).

The foundation of evangelism is not so much what we say, but what we do. As is often said, "Actions speak louder than words." Christ put it this way: "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16).

B. The Importance of Godliness

Peter wrote to believers who were experiencing difficult circumstances. They had been dispersed in various hostile, pagan lands and were being persecuted for their faith (1 Pet. 1:1; 4:12). Peter reminded them that they were very special to God and the recipients of divine privileges (2:9-10). In light of that, they were to live in godliness. That's because a spiritually transformed life attracts unbelievers to Christ and lays a platform of credibility for what we say. Christ is our example to follow because He lived a perfectly righteous life (2:21-25).

Peter identified believers as foreigners (2:11-12), citizens (vv. 13-17), and servants (vv. 18-20). All believers fall into those roles. They are three arenas where the lost observe our lives. How we live certainly has an impact on the lost. A believing wife, for example, can win her unbelieving husband to Christ through her godly, respectful behavior (3:1). And all of us, whether at home, school, or work, should live godly lives because it's God's way of silencing our critics. Second Peter 2:11-12 tells us how to live that way.

LESSON

I. GODLY DISCIPLINE (v. 11)

"Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul."

A. Who Is Responsible (v. 11a)

"Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers."

Peter used the term "beloved" (Gk., agap[ma]etos) eight times in his two letters to identify the believers and remind them that they were the objects of God's great love. He was urging them to reciprocate that love through obedience. Peter wrote that the believers were not only beloved but also "aliens and strangers" (1 Pet. 2:12; cf. 1:1). He identified them as such because as believers their citizenship was in heaven (Phil. 3:20). We're not to love the world since God has taken us out of that kingdom of darkness and placed us into the kingdom of God's Son (cf. 1 John 2:15-17). Our heavenly citizenship is a privilege, but the price of that privilege is to live by God's standard, not the world's.

The Greek term translated "aliens" (paroikos) literally means "alongside the house." It refers to someone living as a foreigner in a land. The term "strangers" (Gk., parepid[ma]emos) refers to a visitor making a brief stay, a sojourner passing through a country, or a traveler moving around within a land. In this life we live alongside unbelievers who have different beliefs, values, and morals. We "do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking the city which is to come" (Heb. 13:14). We know our true home is in heaven.

B. What the Responsibility Is (v. 11b)

"Abstain from fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul."

The believer is "to abstain from fleshly lusts." The Greek term translated "abstain" (apech[ma]o) literally means "to hold away from." The phrase "fleshly lusts" refers to the strong cravings of our sinful nature. Although we have a transformed life in Christ, we still remain in a spiritual battle, fighting against desires that would lead to sin (cf. Rom. 7:14-25).

Yielding to fleshly lusts manifests itself in various ways: "immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, [and] carousing" (Gal. 5:19-21). In contrast to that we are to long for God's Word and offer spiritual sacrifices (1 Pet. 2:2, 5). Because there is a constant spiritual battle between contrasting desires, we as believers eagerly wait for the redemption of our bodies (Rom. 8:23). Only then will we enjoy perfect righteousness.

The believer is to stay away from the strong cravings of his sinful nature, "which wage war against the soul" (1 Pet. 2:11). The Greek term translated "which" (haitines) refers to the nature of something. By their very nature, strong fleshly desires fight against the soul. James 4:1 puts it this way: "What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?" (NIV, cf. 1:14-15).

The term "soul" simply refers to what's inside a person. When God created man he fashioned him into a living soul or being (Gen. 2:7). The strong desires of our sinful nature "wage war" (Gk., strateu[ma]o) against the soul. The verb speaks of carrying on a long-term military campaign, not a skirmish or one-time battle. In 1 Peter 2:11 fleshly lusts are personified as an army of rebels who intend to capture, enslave, and destroy the human soul. The verb implies not just antagonism, but constant and malicious aggression. Fleshly lusts wage an incessant search-and-destroy mission against us.

We are not to surrender to fleshly desires or give them any advantage in their assault (cf. 1 Pet. 4:1-3). Galatians 5:16 says the key to spiritual victory is walking by the Spirit. In 2 Corinthians 10:4-5 the apostle Paul says, "The weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ."

II. GODLY BEHAVIOR (v. 12)

"Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may on account of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation."

Godliness begins with inner spiritual discipline and then is reflected outwardly in one's behavior. "Behavior" (Gk., anastroph[ma]e) refers to one's daily conduct or manner of life. The Greek term translated "excellent" (kalos) speaks of something that is winsome, attractive, fine, or noble. It is goodness in the purest and highest sense. The believer is to manifest good conduct before the "Gentiles" (Gk., ethnos, from which we derive the English word ethnic). It's a general reference to the lost world (cf. 1 Cor. 5:1; 12:2; 3 John 1:7). The lost should be able to see consistent good behavior in the life of any true Christian.

A. It Refutes Slandorous Accusations

First Peter 2:12 says believers will be slandered as "evildoers." That refers to very wicked people worthy of severe punishment (cf. v. 14; 4:15). In Peter's day the lost used that term to heap extreme verbal abuse and contempt against Christians, whom they hated, despised, and mistrusted (cf. Acts 17:6; 28:22). The lost accused Christians of insurrection against the Roman government, cannibalism, and immorality. They were also accused of damaging trade and social progress, ruining family life, leading slaves into rebellion, and hating people. The believer is to refute such slander and false accusations by his or her "good deeds" (1 Pet. 2:12).

B. It Leads Others to Salvation

By seeing the believer's good deeds over a period of time, some unbelievers will "glorify God in the day of visitation" (1 Pet. 2:12). The "day of visitation" refers to a visit from God.

1. God's visitation in the Old Testament

In the Old Testament God visited man for two basic reasons: blessing or judgment. The blessing was often some form of national deliverance from oppression.

a) Isaiah 10:3--The Lord said to the nation Israel, "What will ye do in the day of visitation, and in the desolation which shall come from far?" (KJV). The Lord was going to visit Israel with judgment because of its sin. b) Genesis 50:24--"Joseph said unto his brethren, 'I die: and God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land'" (KJV). Joseph was certain that God would deliver His people from Egyptian bondage. c) Jeremiah 27:22--The Lord said, "They shall be carried to Babylon, and they shall be there until the day I visit them.... Then I will bring them back and restore them to this

place." The Lord was promising to deliver His people from the Babylonian Captivity.d) 1 Samuel 2:21--"The Lord visited Hannah; and she conceived and gave birth to three sons and two daughters. And the boy Samuel grew before the Lord." God visited Hannah and blessed her with a child.

2. God's visitation in the New Testament

While God's visitation in the Old Testament generally refers to judgment or blessing, it specifically refers to redemption or salvation in the New Testament.

a) Luke 1:68--Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, said, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people."b) Luke 7:16--"God has visited His people!" That was the people's response after Christ raised a widow's son from the dead.c) Luke 19:44--In weeping over Jerusalem, Christ said, "You did not recognize the time of your visitation." He mourned that Israel as a whole failed to realize the salvation He would provide.

Certainly "the day of visitation" in 1 Peter 2:12 refers to salvation. When the Lord visits the unbeliever and opens his heart, that person will remember observing the godly behavior of faithful Christians and respond in saving faith. That kind of response glorifies God.

CONCLUSION

During World War II, missionaries Herb and Ruth Clingen and their young son spent three years in a Japanese prison camp in the Philippines. In his diary Herb recorded that their captors murdered, tortured, and starved to death many of their fellow prisoners. The camp commandant, Konishi, was hated and feared more than the others. Herb writes, "Konishi found an inventive way to abuse us even more. He increased the food ration but gave us palay--unhusked rice. Eating the rice with its razor-sharp outer shell would cause intestinal bleeding that would kill us in hours. We had no tools to remove the husks, and doing the job manually--by pounding the grain or rolling it with a heavy stick--consumed more calories than the rice would supply. It was a death sentence for all internees" (Herb and Ruth Clingen, "Song of Deliverance," Masterpiece [Spring 1989]:12).

Before death could claim their lives, however, General Douglas MacArthur and his forces liberated them from captivity. That very day Konishi had planned to gun down all the remaining prisoners. Years later Herb and Ruth "learned that Konishi had been found working as a grounds keeper at a Manila golf course. He was put on trial for his war crimes and hanged. Before his execution he professed conversion to Christianity, saying he had been deeply affected by the testimony of the Christian missionaries he had persecuted" ("Song of Deliverance," p. 13). When God graciously visited Konishi with salvation, that one-time torturer remembered the godly behavior of missionaries he once persecuted. Their example became the unspoken means of Konishi's salvation.

Focusing on the Facts

1. What is the key phrase in 1 Peter 2:11-20?
2. What does "silence" speak of in 1 Peter 2:11?
3. What is the way to silence unfounded criticism (1 Pet. 2:15)?
4. What is the believer's most effective tool for evangelism?
5. What is the critic's greatest point of attack and our greatest point of vulnerability?
6. What were the circumstances of the believers to whom Peter wrote?
7. A spiritually transformed life lays a platform of.
8. Whose example of righteousness should we follow (1 Pet. 2:21-25)?
9. Why did Peter identify believers as "aliens and strangers" (1 Pet. 2:11; Phil. 3:20)? How should that affect your conduct (1 John 2:15-17)?
10. What do "fleshly lusts" refer to (1 Pet. 2:11)?
11. How do fleshly lusts manifest themselves (Gal. 5:19-21)?
12. How are fleshly lusts personified in 1 Peter 2:11?
13. What is the key to victory in our fight against fleshly lusts (Gal. 5:16)?

14. How is inner spiritual discipline reflected?

15. What does "the day of visitation" refer to in the New Testament (1 Pet. 2:12)?

16. When God visits an unbeliever and opens his heart, what will that person remember and how will he respond?

Pondering the Principles

1. The Puritan Richard Baxter offered this practical advice about abstaining from fleshly lusts: "As a man that goeth with a candle among gunpowder, or near thatch, should never be careless, because he goeth in continual danger; so you ... should remember that you carry fire and gunpowder still about you, and are never out of danger while you have such an enemy to watch" (The Practical Works of Richard Baxter vol. 1 [Ligonier, Penn.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1990], p. 55). Exercise inner discipline. "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts" (Rom. 13:14).

2. Look up the following verses and write out the principles they teach about godly living:

1 Timothy 2:1-2

1 Timothy 4:7

1 Timothy 6:10-11

Titus 2:12

2 Peter 1:3-8

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