

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Good Conduct Among the Gentiles 1 Peter 2:11-12

If you are here this morning and have a genuine desire to effectively impact the lost world for Christ then the passage that is before us this morning will be extremely encouraging to you. Let us read **1 Pet. 2:11-12** “**Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul. (12) Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evil doers, they may on account of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.**”

How will this passage encourage us in our efforts of evangelism? This passage helps us to maintain hope even when our initial attempts to evangelize are met with not only disinterest but even hostility. If we are committed to reaching this world for Christ and are actively sharing our faith we will inevitably encounter negative responses, possibly even hostile responses. This passage in fact is addressed to people who are experiencing exactly this situation. And yet Peter holds out the hope to them that one day the very people who are now so hostile toward them will in fact be “glorifying God.”

IN THOSE DIFFICULT WITNESSING SITUATIONS HOW CAN WE MAINTAIN A POSITIVE AND UPBEAT ATTITUDE? WE CAN MAINTAIN A CONFIDENT AND OPTIMISTIC ATTITUDE IN OUR OUTREACH EVEN IN NEGATIVE SITUATIONS WHEN TWO THINGS ARE PRESENT.

1. Abstinence from “fleshly lusts” (V. 11). The exhortation is to abstain from fleshly lusts. The ability to discipline ourselves to abstain from fleshly lusts is absolutely essential in maintaining a positive attitude.

“Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers.” The word “aliens” is the word “PAROIKOUS. It denotes people living in a foreign country where they do not have the rights of citizens. We see it used in that way in **Eph. 2:19**. “Strangers” is the word “PAREPIDEMOUS” and portrays them as living alongside of people to whom they do not belong. The readers and all those who have placed their faith in Christ may be in the world but they are not of it.

The assumption Peter makes in this exhortation is that the readers are indeed the people described in the first part of the letter. Remember **1 Pet. 1:1** “**Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen.**” They are aliens in respect to this world. If they are aliens in respect to this world where in fact is their citizenship? It is in heaven (**Phil. 3:20** “**For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.**”) There is a chorus that was popular many years ago which said, “This world is not my home I am just a passing through my treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue.” And this is the truth for all truly born again believers.

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This knowledge is important in terms of Christian behavior. If we in fact our born again and are no longer the citizens of this world but the citizens of heaven then our conduct should reflect that.

AND HOW WILL BE REFLECTED?

“To abstain from fleshly lusts.” Hopefully are heavenly citizenship will be reflected by us abstaining from fleshly lusts. What are fleshly lusts? When we think of fleshly lust we should not be thinking of simply sexual desires but rather all the cravings of the depraved flesh. We must understand that though we have been born again spiritually that are bodies still are subject to the curse and therefore it continues to cry out for satisfaction, self preservation and material well-being. So here we are on the one hand priests who are to offer up spiritual sacrifices which are acceptable to God through Jesus Christ as we saw in V.5 while at the same time abstaining from “fleshly lusts” which are active in our unredeemed bodies.

This is not an easy task. We can readily see this in the passage before us.

“Which wages war against the soul.” What does he mean by the “soul”? He simply means “you.” When man was created he became a “living soul.” The verb to wage war (STRATEUONTAI) is a military word. It is not a word that conveys a military skirmish but rather a military campaign. These “fleshly lusts” which dwell in the members of our body are like an army of soldiers engaged in constant warfare against the soul, aimed at capturing the believer and making him useless to God. Peter is exhorting us not to fall to this advancing army. Our successful resistance begins with not underestimating the forces that are even now poised for attack. How can we be successful at resisting and abstaining from the army of fleshly lusts that is constantly coming against us? **Gal. 5:16 “But I say, “walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.”** We cannot resist these forces in our strength but in the strength of the Spirit alone. In order to secure His strength we must yield control of our lives to the Spirit no longer living for ourselves but for the one who loved us and gave Himself for us.

If we would do this we would be taking a giant step forward toward confident and optimistic evangelism. And yet though this step is essential there is another step which is also very significant we are going to be able to remain upbeat and positive in our outreach.

2) Outer fruitfulness

“Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles.” Peter shifts the emphasis from the inner spiritual battle to the resultant attractive conduct of believers. The conduct called for here constitutes the visible fruit of victory in the struggle against the inner cravings of “fleshly desires.” Not so much in the sight of God but rather in the sight of the gentiles (ETHNOS). The better translation which is found in the NIV would be “pagans.”

The successful battle against our “fleshly desires” should result in the unbelieving world seeing something in us that they themselves view as positive by using their own standards.

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When we come to Christ we need to be about the work of sharing the good news. But what happens when we having shared with people the gospel find hostility and resistance. Should we continue to batter them with the gospel? Most likely not, rather we need to begin to recognize the power of a changed life to validate the message that we are preaching. If day by day they witness good things, things that they themselves are unable to produce in their own lives it will be a powerful force in their lives.

The word “excellent” is the word KALEN which means beautiful, morally notable, and praiseworthy. Peter was anxious that their Christian conduct be attractive and winsome. This along with inner purity is at the heart of effective evangelism. HOW DO WE KNOW THIS?

“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.” We should not necessarily expect that we will be well received when sharing the gospel. In fact we should be prepared for quite the opposite. Certainly this was the experience of those to whom Peter is writing.

“So that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers.” The believers Peter is writing were being slandered. They accused them of a number of crimes, such as practicing murder, incest, and cannibalism in their secret church meeting. These crimes were deduced from certain expressions that were associated with the church such as “love feasts,” “brother and sister,” “eating the body,” and “drinking the blood” and a crime that they were particularly vulnerable of being accused of was disturbing the peace and good order of the empire. Such slander was common and when brought to the attention of the authorities, and became the basis for judicial persecution. HOW SHOULD THE CHRISTIANS RESPOND TO SUCH SLANDER?

“They may on account of your good deeds, as they observe them glorify God in the day of visitation.” The reference to “good works” and to “glorifying God” recalls the saying of Jesus found in **Matt. 5:16** **“Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify God who is in heaven.”** Peter is apparently drawing on the words of Jesus to define for his readers the purpose of the conduct he requires. The only way to refute accusations of wrongdoing is to “do good.” This same general thought is repeated throughout the epistle **1 Peter 2:15-20, 3:6-17**. WHY IS PETER EXHORTING BELIEVERS IN THIS CONTEXT TO RESPOND IN THIS WAY?

“As they observe them (good deeds) glorify God in the day of visitation.” Because it may in fact result in a dramatic change in the thinking of those who are now slandering them. Look at the word “observe.” EPOPTUONTES is a verb used in the NT only here and in a similar context in 3:2. In itself, it means simply to notice or observe with no particular connotation of religious conversion. Yet the context, both here and in 3:2, suggests an act of observing that leads to a change of mind or outlook, like having one's eyes opened to something not seen before.

The enemies of Peter's readers had only superficially observed their lives; a close, careful scrutiny should have convicted them of their error. What they would discover would hopefully lead them to “glorify God on the day of visitation.”

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The implication is not that the enemies will praise the noble deeds of the Christians while they themselves remain pagans. Rather, that they would glorify God having been convinced of the truthfulness of the gospel through the excellent behavior of Christians.

This is exactly what took place with the centurion at the cross **Mark 15:39**. Having observed the life of Jesus carefully throughout the crucifixion experience what did he exclaim, “**And when the centurion, who was standing right in front of Him, saw the way He breathed His last, he said, Truly this man was the Son of God!**” WHEN WOULD WE EXPECT THIS GLORIFYING OF THE LORD TO TAKE PLACE?

“..... in the day of visitation.” (EN HEMERA EPISKOPES). This day of visitation is a decisive intervention of God in human affairs, whether for judgment ((**Is. 10:3; Jer. 6:15, 8:12, 10:15**) or for blessing **Luke 19:44**. In **Luke 19:44** Jesus had just wept over the city of Jerusalem. Why? Because they had not “**recognized the time of their visitation.**” The visitation that is referred to here in light of the context must I believe be understood as a gracious visitation and as such I would have to conclude that this has already taken place in the lives of those who have come to recognize Jesus as their Lord and their savior. This day of visitation took place in my life approximately 35 years ago.

CONCLUSION

WE ARE CALLED BY THE LORD TO BE HIS AMBASSADORS. WE ARE TO CARRY THE MESSAGE OF THE GOSPEL INTO THE WORLD. WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE MEET WITH HOSTILITY..... DO WE WITHDRAW?..... TO SHRINK BACK IN DISCOURAGEMENT? NO! PETER ENCOURAGES US TO CONTINUE TO ABSTAIN FROM FLESHLY LUSTS AND TO LIVE A LIFE EXCELLENT BEFORE THOSE WE ARE SEEKING TO REACH..... IF WE DO SO WE NEED TO BE FULL OF HOPE KNOWING THAT THE TESTIMONY OF THE GOSPEL’S POWER IN OUR LIFE CAN VALIDATE THE MESSAGE. OPENING THE DOOR OF THEIR HEARTS TO MERCIFUL VISITATION BY CHRIST.

WHAT ABOUT YOURSELF? HAVE YOU COME TO THE PLACE IN YOUR LIFE WHERE YOU HAVE SEEN THE FUTILITY OF LIFE APART FROM GOD? ARE YOU READY TO HAVE THE LORD VISIT YOU AND TO GIVE YOU THE GRACIOUS GIFT OF LIFE?