

The Christian in a Hostile World The Challenge to Moral Excellence

Intro: I have a good preacher friend named Jerry King. We worked together in Lawrenceburg at different congregations several years ago. I remember Jerry would have a prayer request that he would put in every public prayer. It would something like this: “Lord, help us to remember that we are a “chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation and a peculiar people” and may we act like it!”

That is what Peter is saying to us in the second major section of 1 Peter. In the first he focuses on the issue of identity, i.e. who we are (God's family, the true temple of God, the true covenant people of God).

But after we affirm our identity in Christ, we need to own that identity by the way we live. Thus Peter begins this second section with a two-fold challenge:

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. (1 Pet. 2:11-12)

In two powerful verses Peter summarizes the challenge of our lives as Christians! He appeals to them as his "beloved" brothers and sisters in the Lord

Abstain from fleshly lusts!

The Christian is a “walking civil war.”

Two forces vie for our will, the flesh that grows out of the needs of the body and the soul which is the spiritual part of man to which the word of God appeals. Paul using the same idea of inner conflict enumerates the works of the flesh.

Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. (Gal. 5:19-21)

These "wage war" (the word for a military campaign), the seat of spiritual life and moral living.

Christians need to abstain (hold oneself off) from the works of the flesh.

We often hear the word in a context of voting (“For”, “Against”, “Abstain”). Or maybe we hear the word used in referring to a young person’s attitude toward fornication. When a young person practices “abstinence” he/she is holding himself/herself off from one work of the flesh (fornication).

Peter is urging us to consider all areas of our life where the works of the flesh might gain a foothold; and hold oneself off from them.

Why?

Because we are citizens of another country!

There is an expression, "When in Rome, do as the Romans do!" There is a spiritual equivalent. When on earth, do like the rest of the people on earth!

But Peter reminds us that:

We are aliens (outsiders)

We are strangers (foreigners).

Peter has already used both terms of disciples of Jesus (1:1; 17)

Because we are citizens of another country we live by the laws of that country, not by the permissive moral rules of this world.

Keep your behavior excellent!

Our versions have diverse translations here: "honest," "excellent" (NASV), "honorable" (ESV), "live such good lives" (NIV84).

Peter uses the Greek word "kalos": *good, useful, morally good, noble, praiseworthy, contributing to salvation*

The idea would be then that we represent the best in quality of what Christians are supposed to be! Our lives are to filled with "good works."

It is not enough to try to avoid sinning; we must practice positive righteousness!

The Greek text has here a present participle rather than an imperative form. So it might be that the second clause explains the first. It as abstain from fleshly lust by habitually having your behavior excellent. The more we devote ourselves to carrying out God's will the better prepared we'll be to avoid fleshly lusts.

Why is that so important?

Our good deeds will prove the world wrong in what they say about Christians!

For the second time in the book Peter refers to the trials Christians face; but this time he is more specific about the nature of those trials.

The Christians that Peter writes to are suffering the hostility of the unbelieving world around them. They are being slandered or "spoken against" as "evildoers" because they are Christians. They are being accused of things of which they are not guilty.

Our good deeds will lead others to the Lord.

Our neighbors and friends are watching us!

They observe our lives!

"To view carefully as a personal witness" (Wuest)

But they may glorify God in the day of visitation.

"Visitation" translates "episcopos"--the word for overseer. When we visit someone we say "I am going to see them!" So God "visits" the sinner in salvation; he comes to him in grace and mercy.
and will level you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation.” (Lk. 19:44)

Peter applies the principle of the Sermon on the Mount:
“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. (Mt. 5:16)

Perhaps no verse in the NT more clearly portrays the power of a godly example!

Applying Peter's message

We too must abstain from fleshly lusts

Pinpoint the problem areas in your life and pray about it.

Eliminate the situations that make this a temptation for you.

Find out what positive virtue the flesh is substituting for and work to replace every fleshly trait with its proper one!

We too must keep our behavior excellent

“Success means being the best. Excellence means being your best.

Success, to many, means being better than everyone else. Excellence means being better tomorrow than you were yesterday.

Success means exceeding the achievements of other people.

Excellence means matching your practice with your potential.”

Conclusion: Let Peter's challenge burn in your heart daily. Remembering who you are, dare to be different. Rise above mediocrity. Make a difference in the lives of the people around you!