

Keep Your Conduct Honorable
Randolph
1 Peter 2:11-12

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When our son Jake and daughter-in-law Katherine were living in Boston, they rented a basement apartment. The family that owned the house lived upstairs. This family was part of a religious sect that is well-known for being family oriented, morally good, and presenting a wholesome image. But our kids told us how this family was anything but these things. From their downstairs apartment, they frequently heard the couple yelling and cursing at each other. Things were being thrown in heated arguments. It was the opposite of family-oriented, morally good, and wholesome. The conduct of this family made their religious commitments seem very hollow and unattractive.

In the previous passage, we saw that our identity as the special people of God propels us into the world to proclaim the excellencies of God who saved us out of darkness and into light. In our passage today, we see the connection between our proclamation and our conduct. When there is a disconnect between our stated values and our behavior, our message loses credibility and our mission is compromised. In this passage, Peter tells us: **Keep your conduct honorable for the sake of your mission to the world.**

Peter builds his exhortation around two commands, one negative and one positive. In v. 11, he tells us to abstain from the passions of the flesh. In v. 12, he tells us to keep our conduct honorable.

I. Abstain from desires which wage war against you (v. 11).

These instructions are prefaced by another reminder of our identity as Christians. We are sojourners and exiles. We are like resident aliens in this world. Because we belong to Christ, no matter where we live we find ourselves living as strangers because of our faith in Christ.

- A. Abstain = a word that refers to being far away from or distant. In this form, it is to keep oneself away from or abstain from something. Abstinence means we do not participate.
- B. Passions of the flesh = desire. It can be good or evil depending on the context.
 - 1. Fleshly desires – Peter is using the word “flesh” in much the same way Paul does in ethical contexts. Fleshly refers to desires that are driven by our fallen and sinful impulses.
 - a. One writer describes it as “all that partakes of the self-centeredness of human beings.” Another writer calls it “any uncurbed human impulse.”
 - b. It does not refer to only sexual sins although they are certainly included.
 - c. Peter provides some clues as to what these desires look like.
 - 1) 2:1 – malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, slander.
 - 2) 4:3 – sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, lawless idolatry.

2. So fleshly desires are the sinful impulses that push us toward self-indulgence and self-gratifying behaviors. These can be desires for legitimate things (sex, food, leisure, etc) which are illegitimately pursued (sexual immorality, gluttony, laziness).
- C. These desires war against the soul.
1. These desires are described as enemies which seek to conquer and destroy. They seek to control and enslave us. These desires want a hostile takeover.
 2. The soul in this context doesn't mean the immaterial versus the physical. It refers to the self, the whole person. These desires want to control and conquer your life.

This language sounds a little strange to us. We are used to hearing abstinence attached to activities, not desires. Abstain from drinking, abstain from voting, abstain from premarital sex, and so on. Yet, Peter reminds us that abstinence requires that we see the connection between desires and deeds, cravings and conduct. Notice how Peter begins by addressing the inward battle of desires. *The desires lead to the deeds. The cravings lead to the conduct.* If you and I are going to live distinctly Christian lives, we have to begin the fight in our hearts where the battle of desires is waged.

- When you see a pattern of sinful behavior in your life, you need to start asking yourself, “what do I want?” What is the fleshly desire behind that sinful action or attitude?
- You need to begin sawing away at the root of that desire with God's truth and your gospel identity. When your flesh tells you “I have to be noticed and approved by everyone” the gospel tells you “humble yourself and find your acceptance in Christ.” When your flesh tells you “I have to get even for what that person did to me” the gospel tells you “don't take revenge, entrust yourself to God who judges justly.”

To keep with Peter's warfare language, when you deal with desires it is a preemptive strike. Instead of allowing those desires to strengthen and then be deployed in actions and attitudes, you strike them before they gain strength. You cut off the supply line of ungodly actions by abstaining from the desires that drive those actions.

Friends, the first step in Peter's strategy to protect the credibility of our mission is to be sure that we resist the control of desires which undercut our identity as followers of Jesus. Abstain from desires which destroy the soul.

II. Maintain deeds that display the gospel (v. 12).

A. Keep your behavior honorable.

1. This word “behavior” is used several times by Peter. He uses it repeatedly to refer to the visible lifestyle of a person.
2. The term honorable refers to a lifestyle that is visibly virtuous, good, and beautiful.
3. This excellent behavior is parallel to good deeds later in the verse. Peter used the language of good deeds/works/behavior seven times in this letter.
4. This emphasis of a life of visible good deeds is repeated throughout the NT.
 - a. It started with Jesus himself in Matt. 5:16.
 - b. Paul emphasized it often – see Eph. 2:10; Titus 2:7, 14.

c. Titus 2:10 refers to this as “adorning the doctrine of God.”

Patrick Greene of San Antonio, Texas, has had a long history of disliking and combating Christians. At one point Greene, an outspoken local atheist, threatened to sue Henderson County about the yearly manger display at the courthouse. "My wife and I had never had a Christian do anything nice for us," Greene said in a local newspaper interview.

But all of that changed in March of 2012 when the 63-year-old Greene learned that he needed surgery for a detached retina. Greene didn't have money to pay for the surgery, and he had to give up his cab driving job. When Jessica Crye, a member of Sand Springs Baptist Church, heard about Greene's situation, she told her pastor, Eric Graham, who then called Greene. Greene said, "If you really want to contribute something, we need groceries."

Greene thought that if anything, he'd see \$50, or at most \$100. But a few days later, the church sent a check for \$400. More checks soon followed. The flabbergasted Greene said, "I thought I was in the Twilight Zone. These people are acting like what the Bible says a Christian does."

Now, rather than try to remove the manger display, Greene said he would like to add his contribution—a star for the top of the Nativity scene. However, Greene added, "You people can figure out how to plug it in."

We would be wise to follow the code of conduct that John Wesley suggested: *Do all the good you can, By all the means you can, In all the ways you can, In all the places you can, To all the people you can, As long as ever you can.*

B. Visibly good deeds display the gospel.

1. Visibly good deeds help to nullify the naysayers. When they speak evil against you, your life shows otherwise.
2. Visibly good deeds display the gospel.
 - a. As they observe your good deeds, they may glorify God in the day of visitation. Tom Schreiner explains it in this way: *Peter exhorted believers to live noble lives because in doing so unbelievers will see their good works. Because they observe such works, some unbelievers will repent and believe and therefore give glory to God on the last day.*
 - b. The idea is that as critical unbelievers see the reality of the gospel displayed in the good deeds of Christians, they are persuaded and converted to Christ.

One of the most powerful arguments in support of the gospel is a real Christian who lives a visibly consistent, gospel-centered life. One of the most powerful hindrances to the gospel is a professing Christian who lives a visibly inconsistent, self-centered life.

Conclusion

An early example of Peter's emphasis comes from a document written in the second century AD.

This document called “Epistle to Diognetus” was written as an explanation and defense of Christianity. As you listen to selections from this document, note the similarity in emphasis to what Peter is calling for in our passage today.

The difference between Christians and the rest of mankind is not a matter of nationality, or language, or customs. Christians do not live in separate cities of their own, speak any special dialect, not practice any eccentric way of life. ... They pass their lives in whatever township—Greek or foreign—each man's lot has determined; and conform to ordinary local usage in their clothing, diet, and other habits. Nevertheless, the organization of their community does exhibit some features that are remarkable, and even surprising. For instance, though they are residents at home in their own countries, their behavior there is more like transients. ... Though destiny has placed them here in the flesh, they do not live after the flesh; their days are passed on earth, but their citizenship is above in the heavens. They obey the prescribed laws, but in their own private lives they transcend the laws. They show love to all men—and all men persecute them. They are misunderstood, and condemned; yet by suffering death they are quickened into life. They are poor, yet making many rich; lacking all things, yet having all things in abundance. ... They repay [curses] with blessings, and abuse with courtesy. For the good they do, they suffer stripes as evildoers.

This is what it looks like to live as a Christian in a non-Christian culture. Christians do not distinguish themselves by wearing a certain kind of clothes or speaking a special language or living eccentric lifestyles. We distinguish ourselves by lives which demonstrate loyalty of Jesus Christ, love for our neighbors, and willingness to suffer for the sake of Christ.

Live your life in such a way that if you had renters living in your basement, they would take your Christian faith seriously.