

I PETER

- I. Be Holy In All Your Behavior With A Holiness Like God's Holiness
 - A. **I Peter 2:11-17** . . . 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 evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation. [13] Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, [14] or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. [15] For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men. [16] Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God. [17] Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king.
 - B. As I stated last Sunday, **I Peter 2:11** is the first of God's two general exhortations toward being holy as He is holy in all our behavior. In this verse, God commands us to abstain from fleshly lusts, and warns us that if we don't, they will weaken us spiritually and put distance between God and us. Today we will look at **verse 12**, where God commands us to live godly lives out in public for the sake of bringing God glory.
 - C. Pray
- II. General Rules For Holy Living – Public Behavior
 - A. **I Peter 2:12** . . . Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.
 - B. **Among the gentiles (unbelievers)**
 1. Unless we are hermits or stranded on an ocean island, all of us live part of our life in full view of our immediate family, extended family, neighbors, friends, co-workers, exercise buddies, the people who wait on us at our favorite restaurants, gas stations, grocery stores, the fruit market, bank, library, or other places we frequent, our auto mechanic, our children's friends, just to name a few of

- those who observe our lives day after day. Of course, if you are a high school or college age Christian, then you are also observed by your parent's friends and your teachers and your fellow students.
- a. Now the majority of those who watch us and experience our behavior are unbelievers – or gentiles as Peter refers to them.
 - b. In other words, the average Christian lives most of his life in the presence of unbelievers. In fact, almost everywhere we go we encounter far more unbelievers than God-fearing Christians.
2. And it is this reality, that we Christians are **the few among the many**, that Jesus addressed when He said: “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden; [15] nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. [16] 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” (**Matthew 5:14-16**).
 3. There are two points I want to make about these words of Jesus.
 - a. **First**, at night, the city on the hill is seen, not because of its size, but because its lights makes it stand out from all the surrounding darkness. In the same way, the light of a Christ-like life is equally obvious in the darkness of this world.
 - b. **Second**, at night, the city cannot hide itself from being seen without extinguishing its lights, and we cannot hide our Christ-likeness without so blending into the darkness around us that we are indistinguishable from the darkness.
 4. The point in these words of Jesus is that the natural outcome of living according to the Christ who is within us is to be different in a way that gives unbelievers the opportunity to see our godly living and therefore have a legitimate reason to glorify God. And this brings us back to the first words of **I Peter 2:12**.

C. Keep your behavior excellent among the gentiles (unbelievers)

1. The first two things I want to point out about this statement are the words **keep** and **excellent**.
 - a. The word “**keep**” implies an effort on our part that is equal to the task of maintaining something or continuing in something indefinitely. In other words, to keep our behavior excellent is to continuously maintain excellent behavior among unbelievers.
 - b. The word **excellent** sets the standard for the behavior we are to continuously maintain. This means we are to consistently live lives that are above reproach and therefore obviously different

in attitudes, words, and deeds from the lives of the unbelievers around us.

- c. In other words, our behavior is to exemplify such godly qualities as kindness, respect, humility, patience, mercy, compassion, honesty, dependability – and I could go on and on, but I want to look at some scriptures that speak about this.
2. The scriptures give us some specific and practical examples of what our behavior among unbelievers ought to look like. Consider:
 - a. **Philippians 2:14-16** . . . Do all things without grumbling or disputing; [15] so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, [16] holding fast (*in word and deed*) the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I will have reason to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain.
 - b. **I Thessalonians 4:10b-12** . . . But we urge you, brethren, to excel still more (*improve, surpass, rise higher than you have*), [11] and to make it your ambition (*driving desire*) to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands, just as we commanded you, [12] so that you will behave properly toward outsiders and not be in any need.
 - c. **Romans 13:12-14** . . . The night is almost gone (*this world as we now know it*), and the day is near (*return of Christ*). Therefore let us lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. [13] Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. [14] But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.
 - d. **Titus 2:6-8** . . . Likewise urge the young men to be sensible; [7] in all things show yourself to be an example of good deeds, with purity in doctrine (*living up to what you teach, no hypocrisy*), dignified, [8] sound in speech (*rational, reasonable*) which is beyond reproach, so that the opponent will be put to shame, having nothing bad to say about us.
 - e. **Romans 13:8-10** . . . Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. [9] For this, "You shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not covet," and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, "You

shall love your neighbor as yourself." [10] Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

3. The church, from its earliest days took these scriptures we just read and taught them as the normal way for Christians to live. Tertullian (2nd century) was one such churchman, and in writing about the differences between the unbelievers and the Christians of his day he said "that unbelievers delighted in the bloody gladiatorial spectacles of the amphitheater, whereas a Christian was excommunicated if he went to it at all. No Christian was found in prison for crime, but only for the faith. The heathen excluded slaves from some of their religious services, whereas Christians had some of their presbyters (elders, deacons, other church leaders) of the class of slaves. In fact, slavery silently and gradually disappeared by the power of the Christian law of love, "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." When the pagans deserted their nearest relatives in a plague, Christians ministered to the sick and dying. When the Gentiles left their dead unburied after a battle and cast their wounded into the streets, the disciples hastened to relieve the suffering."
4. To these scriptures and Tertullian's writing we could add a few more behaviors that we in our day are wise to consider in relation to being God's light in our day.
 - a. Paying debts on time and in full – including home mortgages.
 - b. Tipping waiters as if your income depended on it.
 - c. Putting away self-centered claiming and complaining, such as "Its my right," or "You hurt my feelings."
 - d. Being careful not to feed greed or become covetous or get attached to the things of this world – but rather being content with what you have.
5. Or to sum up all I have been saying about excellent behavior in two words, those words would be **holiness** and **love** – a holiness like unto God's holiness and love like God's love.
6. I want to make one last point about this exhortation to keep our behavior excellent. Though showing forth godly behavior is a silent form of evangelism, it is not intended to replace direct, vocal evangelism.
 - a. The intention of keeping our behavior excellent is to provide unbelievers with a day-to-day example of a people group who have made God their God and His righteousness their standard of behavior. (example – Al Harris)

- b. My point here is that both the silent message of a godly life and the vocal proclaiming of the gospel are important to evangelism.
- 7. Therefore, I urge you to keep in mind that whether the people around you know you are a Christian or not, you are an advertisement for God and the Christian way of life. And either you commend God and the Christian life to others – regardless of how they respond to your godly living – or you give them just cause to think less of God and to denigrate the Christ-like life.

D. So that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.

- 1. The first thing I would like you to notice is that as unbelievers observe our godly behavior and kind deeds, sometimes they malign us, and once in while they glorify God. What makes the difference?
 - a. Unbelievers take offense at the way sincere Christians live because the selflessness and justness of the Christian's behavior exposes and condemns the selfishly unrighteous behavior of the unbeliever. And as we well know, no one wants their selfishness exposed, and no one wants to feel condemned for the way they live.
 - b. However, there are those times when unbelievers give thanks to God, or in some other way acknowledge that God is good. These kinds of times happen when our godly living
 - (1) meets a serious need in their life,
 - (2) or supports a cause they support,
 - (3) or defends them when they are being unjustly condemned,
 - (4) or is seen by them to be a determining factor in their coming to repentance and faith in God,
 - (5) or causes them, on the day of final judgment, to humbly acknowledge that God has been right and good all along.
 - c. Now I want to make a side point here that is not always well received. Being slandered as evil doers, or even persecuted in some form or another for living a godly life is a blessing for us (**Matthew 5:3, 10-12; Luke 6:22-23; I Peter 4:14**). And on the other hand, living a godly life so that unbelievers come to the place of glorifying God is a blessing for God and for them.
- 2. Moving on with **verse 12**, the next thing I want us to notice is that **we will face** slander, false accusations, and mis-representation for openly living godly lives. There is no getting out of it!

- a. In the earliest days of the church, Christians were accused of cannibalism. This accusation came from unbelievers misconstruing Christ's words at the Last Supper, when He said, "Take eat, this is my body," and, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, drink all of it." The slander went so far as to have it inferred and spread around by unbelievers that Christians killed and ate a child at each of their communion services.
 - (1) They were also accused of immorality, and even incest. This false accusation came about because Christians called their meetings the Agape, or the Love Feast.
 - (2) The Christians were accused of hurting legitimate business and damaging trade. As far as we know the silversmiths of Ephesus were the first to make this charge (**Acts 19:21-41**).
 - (3) Christians were accused of "damaging family relationships," because it often happened that families were driven apart when one or more members of a family became Christians.
 - (4) They were accused of turning slaves against their masters because they taught that in Christ we are all one and all free. In fact, within the church, some slaves became elders and pastors and deacons, which only served to validate the accusations of unbelievers.
 - (5) Christians were accused of "hatred of mankind" based on their teaching that the world and the Church were opposed to each other.
 - (6) And Christians were accused of disloyalty to Caesar, because no Christian would worship the Emperor's likeness or burn incense before it. And no Christian would declare that Caesar was Lord – even on pain of death.
 - b. In the early 1900's, sincere Christians took a stand against movies, dancing, gambling, card playing, drinking, smoking, the circus, professional sporting events – which included boxing at that time, mixed bathing, girls and ladies wearing pants, short shorts, short skirts, and low cut tops (immodest dress), men wearing shorter shorts or going without a shirt – just to name a few things. In response, the unbelievers, *and even some in the church*, accused Christians of being against having fun or having a good time, or against celebrations and relaxation.
3. I would like to be able to say that, generally speaking, Christians in our day are falsely accused and maligned. Now there is no question that on certain issues, such as abortion, homosexuality, and same-

sex marriage, Christians today are maligned and even treated with hostility for holding the line established by God. And I don't doubt that some Christians, holding a line here or there on some other issue, are mistreated for taking a stand.

- a. And yet it is my opinion that, generally speaking, today's Christianity is openly hypocritical and selectively righteous in that it takes a stand against certain sinful practices of unbelievers while joining them in other sinful practices so that we now have many of the world's ills in the church.
- b. Even the way many Christians hold God's line against abortion, homosexuality, and same-sex marriage exposes our selective righteousness – which means we deserve some of the criticism received for our stand on these issues.
- c. However, if we Christians would seriously heed God's previous exhortation to abstain from fleshly lusts (**verse 11**), we would get rid of the hypocrisy and selective righteousness in ourselves and in the church so as to present to the world a light that is much more like God's light than the dim, compromised light it is now.

III. Conclusion

- A. In spite of the ills plaguing today church, the point God is making here in **I Peter 2:12**, is that godly living in full view of the unbelieving public often results in false accusations, derogatory labels, and even persecution. And yet, there will come those times when unbelievers will give God His due glory because God's people have lived godly lives.
- B. Let us not grow weary in living a godly life – in spite of the response received from the unbelieving world around us, for it is in living godly each and every day that we commend God and the Christian life to those who do not believe.