

CONDUCT BEFORE UNBELIEVERS

BY B. G. ECHOLS

Peter has described the spiritual relationship that those called by God have gained in His "marvelous light" (1 Pet. 2:9). As God's chosen people, Christians have many special duties. Included is our responsibility to those outside of Christ. "Beloved, I beseech you as sojourners and pilgrims, to abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul; having your behavior seemly among the Gentiles; that, wherein they speak against you as evil-doers, they may be your good works, which they behold, glorify God in the day of visitation" (1 Pet. 2:11, 12).

To beseech is to admonish tenderly, to entreat or to plead with. Peter's address is one of affection. What he wants them to do is based on his love for them and his desire for their salvation. Let this be always our motivation in working with others.

As sojourners and pilgrims they are far from home. They are on a journey. There are always people watching their conduct from day to day. We reside on earth, but our real home is in heaven, and our life is devoted to Him who reigns on high (Eph. 2:19; Phil. 3:20). This has always been the case with God's people (Heb. 11:13). Living in an alien land, we cannot partake of the evil character of its citizens. We must seek not to offend those who live here, and we should seek their good by helping them learn of Christ. Have we lost that sense of sojourning that characterized the early Christians? Have we not become at home in Babylon so that the world influences us more than we influence it?

All lusts are, in a sense, fleshly; but here it seems he is thinking of such things as were most characteristic of the Gentiles (1 Pet. 1:14). The basic threat to our salvation is not external, but internal (Jas. 1:14, 15). The world's temptations would be no problem if there were not something in us that responds. To abstain is to hold back. It is a constant, ever-present duty. It must be deliberate on our part. The discipline of watchfulness is the price of winning the war against the flesh. To overcome a temptation we must have a viable, alternative response with which to replace it. If we are not going to live by our desires, we must live by God's commands. Jesus is our example. Peter gives three reasons to abstain: we

are heavenly citizens and thus strangers and pilgrims here; self-discipline is in the interest of our souls; and our influence on others will be for the glory of God.

The soul is man's higher nature. In this passage it would include the eternal spirit. Flesh is a good servant, but a bad master. All lusts war against our soul. Lusts are actively campaigning against our spiritual well-being (Gal. 5:16, 17). It is a battle. Indulgence in fleshly lusts destroys all the finer faculties of the inner man; his conscience, understanding, memory, and judgment. All of these can be ruined by sin. Consider the damage done by drugs and alcohol. Here is the great mischief of sin. It wars against the soul. It robs the soul of comfort and peace now, and forever. It plunges the soul into everlasting misery.

Peter is especially fond of the word "behavior" (manner of living), and uses the thought as much as all the rest of the New Testament (1 Pet. 1:15, 18; 3:1, 2, 16; 2 Pet. 3:11). The thought is of their visible conduct from day to day. "Seemly" is the ordinary word for "beautiful." Their conduct is to be attractive to the sight of others (1 Thess. 4:12). We have an obligation to the ungodly to make our lives attractive as well as exemplary. Our lives have to be correct, but also beautiful.

What happens when a member of a minority acts in a wicked and unbecoming way? How do those in the majority respond? The unbelievers falsely charged Christians with being evil-doers. Thus we must watch ourselves even more that our conduct be without blame. The early Christians were charged with being atheists because they did not accept the gods of the pagans. They were called cannibals because they spoke of eating the flesh and drinking the blood. Because they met early in the morning before going to work, they were charged with having secret meetings in which the vilest practices were taught and conducted. The New Testament contains some examples of evil-speaking against Christians (Acts 17:6, 7; 19:27, 28).

Many of the specifics of what Peter exhorts us to be are discussed in the paragraphs that follow where he discusses submission to government, conduct of slaves, the proper relationship of husband and wives, and finally the Christians' conduct toward one an-

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other. It is not primarily for our earthly safety we are to do these things, but for the glory of God and the salvation of others. The thought of beauty in our lives needs to be carried over into our worship and the doing of God's work. We must never give the Lord shoddy service, but seek to do the best we can whether in our assembly or in private worship and teaching. Let the enemies of Christ be eye-witnesses of our goodness. Let our only vindication be the beauty of our lives. Whether or not it is too late for the beholders to be saved, they will, at last, acknowledge that God was among these strangers and pilgrims. Our purpose in living is to bring glory to God; not ourselves. Any recognition given to us as children will be a reflection on our heavenly Father Who taught us.

The expression "day of visitation" was used by the Lord to refer

to His ministry in Jerusalem (Lk. 19:44). God had brought them opportunity which they refused. Thus here the idea is of God's coming to these people in the offer of salvation, but He will also visit in judgment. In fact, any opportunity to obey God turns to judgment if not used. If the unbelievers hear the gospel and accept, they will glorify God. If they reject the gospel, they will glorify God in judgment. In either case, they will remember the conduct of Christians they had ridiculed, and eternally regret their own actions.

Think about this in our context. Let us live lives that can stand the careful scrutiny of our neighbors that when they have the opportunity to hear the gospel, they will be led to glorify God by having seen us live as we should. Our lives are to reinforce the gospel.

Matthew 28:18-19

EXAMPLES OF CONVERSION

Mark 16:15-16

PREACHING	BELIEVED	REPENTED	CONFESSED	BAPTIZED	SAVED
Pentecost Acts 2:14-41		Repent 37-38		Baptized 38-41	Remission of Sins 38-47 Saved
Samaritans Acts 8:5-13	Believed 12			Baptized 12-13	
Eunuch Acts 8:35-39	Believed 36-37		Confessed 37	Baptized 38	Rejoiced 39
Saul Acts 9:1-18				Baptized 18	Sins Washed Away 22:16
Cornelius Acts 10:34-48	Believed 43			Baptized 48	Remission of Sins 43
Lydia Acts 16:13-15				Baptized 15	
The Jailor Acts 16:25-34	Believed 34			Baptized 33	Rejoiced 34
Corinthians Acts 18:8	Believed 8			Baptized 8	

PREACHING
Romans 10:14
Romans 10:17

FAITH
Hebrews 11:6
John 6:28-29; 8:24

REPENTANCE
Luke 13:3
Acts 17:30

CONFESSION
Romans 10:10
Matthew 10:32-33

BAPTISM
Galatians 3:27
1 Peter 3:21

SALVATION
2 Timothy 2:10
Matthew 7:21-23