

1 P E T E R

A VERSE BY VERSE STUDY THROUGH PETER'S EPISTLE

SESSION OBJECTIVE: 1 PETER 2:11-12

To understand how the church's conduct impacts its witness to the world.

Good Works Matter

The New Testament is clear that salvation come, "by grace through faith" (Eph. 2:8), and that it is, "not a result of works" (Eph. 2:9). We are never called to do more in order to please God, or to try and earn our salvation. That isn't even possible. Nothing we do merits salvation, and in the same way, nothing we don't merits losing it; it's purely a work of God. However, the common mistake in grace-driven churches is to write off the importance of works altogether. Jesus said, "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is heaven" (Matt. 5:16). In other words, good works don't save, but they *do* matter.

In verse 12, Peter encourages the collective church once again to, "keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable." Why? So that, "they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation" (1 Pet. 1:12). Peter is almost echoing Jesus' words in Matthew 5:16. Our conduct before non-believers is of crucial importance. Again, this passage is addressed to y'all, not singular you. Your individual behavior is important, but it's important especially in the context of the church at large. The world may not notice your individual behavior, but they will notice the church collectively.

Foreigners

Verse 11 begins with Peter's urgent plea for us to, "abstain from the passions of the flesh," but he says to do so, "as sojourners and exiles." This is a repeating theme throughout 1 Peter. We are, as Christians, like

sojourners in a foreign land. The word *sojourner* conjures imagery from the Septuagint (LXX) translation of Genesis 23, wherein Abraham needs a plot of land to bury his wife Sarah. Abraham says in Genesis 23:4, “I am a stranger and a sojourner among you; give me a burial site among you that I may bury my dead out of my sight.” As a traveling foreigner, he must negotiate with the natives of the land in order to accomplish his task.

Consider a more general understanding of foreigners for a moment. Foreigners sometimes make statements that make sense in their own language, but don’t translate as well in another language. They sometimes dress differently, have different customs, and don’t understand “normal” behavior as it pertains to their context. As a result of this, foreigners are usually noticeable. They stand out in a crowd. People take notice of their behavior, not because it’s wrong, but different. Peter is saying, as Christians, we are like foreigners because our behaviors, our demeanors, and our cultural standards are *holy*, and thus, *different* than the world around us, and they are noticed. We stand out in a crowd.

In this context, what makes us stand out is our abstention from the passions of the flesh. The flesh here entails any of the natural desires that we have as human beings apart from the working of the Spirit. This should not just be relegated to sexual sin, but any impulse behavior that seeks to have dominion over our spiritual self. Peter says, because of this reality, these passions, “way ware against your soul.” The soul in a Jewish context is not a reference to the immaterial part of a person, but rather represents the whole person. This kind of warfare is not a potential, but a promise. You will battle it. It is by the power of the Spirit of God that Christians have the ability to battle it, whereas a non-believer cannot stop it nor even recognize it.

Conscious Conduct

In verse 12, Peter goes on to say that not only is it important for us to abstain from the flesh, but to keep our conduct in check among non-believers. The word conduct is translated from the Greek word ἀναστροφή (anastrophē), which means something like, “mode of life.” This is a well-used word in Peter’s letter. In 1:15, Peter uses it to refer to the holiness of life required of all Christians in light of Christ Himself. In 1:18, it expresses the evil way of life that we inherit from ancestors, a way of life that Christ redeems us out of. In 3:1-2, it depicts the godly behavior of wives, and in 3:16 it depicts the godly life of those suffering as believers. The mode of life for Christians is important for a variety of reasons, but below are two of them from this passage.

A TEST OF PATIENCE

The command to keep our conduct honorable in the presence of Gentiles becomes more challenging when Peter says, “so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds” (1 Pet. 1:12). It’s one thing to remain honorable in the presence of people, but it’s an entirely different challenge when those same people revile you. Again, this is an opportunity for the flesh to gain a foothold, and so the Christian must double down in his/her efforts to abstain from the temptation to give in to the flesh. It’s tempting to want to “fight back” when someone slanders you or speaks badly of you, especially when your conduct is above reproach. However, it is this context that is most important because it is the most difficult and thus brings the greatest witness to the love and mercy of Christ. It requires patience, which we all have in Christ, as a part of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23).

As a side note, this type of slander is expected from non-believers, which is perhaps why it’s so unbecoming when Christians do it. When a Christian speaks negatively about other Christians behind their backs,

regardless of the reason (there is no actual good reason), it reveals that at best they are reverting back to their old self, and at worst that they might not even be regenerate and therefore still in sin.

A TASTE OF MERCY

While it is a test of patience for Christians to maintain Godly behavior in the face of degradation, it is an opportunity for a taste of mercy for the non-believer watching. The expected reaction to slander is offense and equally ungodly behavior. When the Christian maintains composure, an opportunity arises: “They may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.” The question becomes, “What is the day of visitation?”

Many have argued that this is a reference to the eschatological judgment in the Second Coming of Jesus. The argument centers around non-believers being judged for their rebellion against God, and remembering the good works of Christians as they face the consequences for their actions. However, this is not convincing for a couple of reasons. One, it seems strange to say that they will glorify God as a result of this. The action of glorifying God is a result of belief. For example, Acts 13, Paul begins to proclaim the Gospel on the Sabbath to many Gentiles, which draws the ire of the Jews. Acts 13:48 says, “And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.” Conversely, those who refuse to believe do not glorify God (Acts 12:23; Rom. 1:21).

The likely intended meaning here for, “the day of visitation” is a visitation from God that leads to repentance and salvation. Several ancient Jewish literary works use this exact phrase for this intended purpose as well. Peter is making the case that good works are important because they are a witness to nonbelievers and can be used by God to bring about new life in Christ, which will lead them to then bring glory to God. It is not that good works save us, but they can be used by God to lead others to salvation eventually. Beyond that, they might even entertain angels (Heb. 13:2).

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read 1 Peter 2:11. What does Peter mean by “sojourners and exiles?”

2. Read Genesis 23:4. What problem did Abraham have because he was a sojourner? How does this helpless relate to Peter’s point?

Day Two

1. Read 1 Peter 2:11. What does Peter mean by “passions of the flesh?”

2. Read 1 Peter 2:11. Why does Peter say that the flesh wages war against the soul? (Hint: See above notes)

Day Three

1. Read 1 Peter 2:12. What kind of conduct are we commanded to have among the Gentiles?

2. Read 1 Peter 2:12. How will the Gentiles speak of Christians? Will this make keeping honorable conduct easier or more difficult? Why?

Day Four

1. Read 1 Peter 2:12. What will the Gentiles do as a result of seeing your good works?

2. Read 1 Peter 2:12. What does the day of visitation likely refer to, and why? (Hint: See above notes)

Week 11 Discussion: Living It Out

In this week's study, Peter tells us to, "keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good works and glorify God on the day of visitation" (1 Peter 2:12). Peter seems to be echoing Jesus' words from Matthew 5:16: "In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." The bottom line is this: Good works matter. They matter, not because they bring about our salvation (they can't), but because they are a witness to nonbelievers that God can use to bring about salvation in others. Talk as a group about the importance of good works, what you excel and struggle with, and how to be more mindful of it.

1. Icebreaker: What comes to mind when you hear the term, "good works?"
2. Think back to when you were a nonbeliever - was there anyone in your life that lived out a great witness that impacted you in a positive manner? If so, share with the group.
3. How difficult is it to live with honorable conduct when someone is slandering you? Why?
4. How do you balance living with honorable conduct among nonbelievers but also not doing things to get attention?
5. Where do you do the most good works? (e.g. church, home, work, etc.)
6. When you fail to live with honorable conduct, how important is it to make amends to those around you?

Takeaways:

1. Good works are important because they present a witness to nonbelievers that God can use to lead them to salvation.
2. We are called to live a life of holiness even in the face of slander and degradation.

PRAYER REQUESTS: