

THE GODLY WALK OF PILGRIMS

We continue our study of I Peter beginning with chapter 2, verse 11 to the end of the chapter. After reminding us in the first part of the chapter of the spiritual origin of the Christian, and identifying his glorious position within the body of Christ, the apostle points out how this Christian must walk in this world. One, after all, can not be nominally a member of Christ's body, His church, without also revealing that in what he does.

So the apostle Peter addresses the "dearly beloved" as he brings this spiritual message down to a very practical and personal plane. Not only, however, are they "beloved", but they are "pilgrims and strangers". "Strangers" are so-journers; they are those who remain for a brief time in another land than their homeland. "Pilgrim" is an alien--one who obviously does not belong in this different land. Such are those who are a part of Christ's church. These live in the world for a time. They have their work here; their families are here. But they are citizens of the kingdom of heaven. This fact of citizenship in heaven definitely shows in what these do and say. Just as a "foreigner" can often be identified as such by his speech and perhaps dress, so the Christian is identified in this world as one who is citizen of the kingdom of heaven. He lives differently; he acts differently; he talks differently--than do the citizens of this wicked world. And this must be the case if he is indeed a pilgrim.

Specifically, he is to abstain from fleshly lusts. These are those sins of the flesh in which one desires material things as something in itself; or he desires to live as an adulterer; or desires to steal, or kill; or he envies, shows jealousy. "Fleshly lusts" are then all those actions ^{,performed in our flesh,} /which are condemned by the law of God. The "pilgrim" must deliberately turn away from all those things. To engage in such, is to involve one's self with that which wars against the soul. "Fleshly lusts" work against the life of Christ which is in the heart. Such lusts are as enemies seeking to destroy the life of Christ within the person. These lusts tend to get one to walk as a citizen of this world rather than a citizen of the kingdom of heaven. We must recognize this in ourselves too--for the fleshly lusts are not minor matters, but a spiritual problem that appears to threaten our spiritual life.

Therefore Christians are reminded in verse 12 that they are to have a "conversation honest among the Gentiles". This "conversation" is more than our speech; it represents the whole of one's walk in the world. What the Christian says, what he does, even what he thinks, must be "honest" or "good". Our conduct must be always in harmony with the law of God--not only at such times as it might be to our material advantage, but also when it would be to our material disadvantage. The conduct of the Christian must be such that no one, no, not even among wicked men, will find occasion to criticize or condemn legitimately. Though the "Gentiles", who here represent all of the godless people of the world, do accuse the believer of doing evil, we may never do anything that would give grounds for such accusation. It must be true that their accusations are false.

Even, it must be true that they do behold your good deeds--those in harmony with God's Word and law and out of true faith. While accusing the Christian of doing evil, these must at the same time recognize that their accusations are false. And in the day of visitation, which is the day Christ returns to judge on the clouds of heaven, these will be forced to admit that their accusations were false. They will be forced to confess that the works of the Christian were good and right. Thus they will be compelled to "glorify God" in that judgment day. This is, you understand, a forced confession--in that day of judgment they will be compelled to acknowledge the true facts concerning the conduct of Christians on this earth.

And the point of this instruction is: the Christian must so live that never can the wicked find ground for pointing an accusing finger at him. He must be honest or good in his business, in his choice of entertainment, in his relationship to fellow man, in his seeking of God's Word and His church. And we too face the question: do we live in this way?

This godly conversation or conduct is more concretely identified when Peter speaks of one's relationship to those in authority. There, of course, is where the crux of much difficulty often lies. Verse 13 teaches that calling to "submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake." Quite different is this teaching from the general concept of our own day. Today it is popular to rebel or promote rebellion whenever one claims some injustice towards himself or others. Even churches and individual members of these support or promote rebellion in countries where there is real or imagined injustices.

Yet this Scripture teaches submission to the king, governors, and all such in authority. There is only one Scriptural exception: where there is a conflict between obedience to God and that to man. We read of such in Acts 5:29 where Peter and the other apostles plainly told the Jewish authorities, "We ought to obey God rather than men." This was their response to the command that they no longer preach the name of Jesus. But even then, there is submission to authority in that one will rather be sent to prison than to rise up in rebellion, seeking to overthrow instituted authority. The apostle Paul, in Romans 13:1,2 writes, "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God; the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation." Mind you, this was written at the time when one of the most godless, depraved of all rulers governed ~~over~~ over Rome: the wicked Nero. One has then the calling to submit to those in authority even when we may disagree with the decrees--provided submission does not force us to violate the commands of God. All of this is "for the Lord's sake." Obedience to Jesus requires the submission to these in authority.

Verse 14 also outlines the duties of those who govern. They are to punish evil doers and praise those who do well. It is at this point that lawful authority has taken upon itself far more than this Word of God suggests. In the first place, government has become involved in all kinds of activities besides that of maintaining good order in society. This leads to the kind of socialism and even communism which is seen throughout the world. The proper domain of government is to maintain good order. The government must punish evildoers--even, I am convinced, unto the use of the death sentence. Romans 13 points out that this authority is given sword-power. It must use that against the evil-doer too. At the same time, government must promote the good. It must not punish well-doers, but "praise" them.

Obedence to such authority, according to verse 15, is according to the "will of God." It is not man who determines whether or not he ought to obey, but God Who gives command that such obedience takes place.

Godly obedience, too, puts to silence the ignorance of foolish men (vs. 15). Often in the history of this world, children of God have been accused of disobedience to civil authorities. These have been accused of violating the laws of the land; of promoting rebellions. And to the shame of the church, it must be admitted that there were times when

this charge was true. But for the most part, members of the church have been the most faithful of citizens in earthly kingdoms. These have been honest, law-abiding members of society. What men claim against these Christians is proved false by their deeds.

The matter of proper submission of the Christian to all those in authority is further set forth in verse 17. There the apostle emphasizes the calling to "honor all men" and to "love the brotherhood." Again he repeats: "Fear God. Honor the king." All of this emphasizes the position of a Christian in the world as he confronts others about him. He does nothing to destroy or harm other men. He shows that spiritual love for the saints as Scripture requires. In all of this he is submissive to the will of His God and obedient to those who rule on this earth. And so it also should be. Christians are not rebels; they are not revolutionaries in that ordinary, earthly sense.

Verse 18 goes further when it speaks of Christian servants, who may well have been slaves, and their obedience to their masters in spiritual fear. This Word of God does not advocate some sort of crusade against slavery. It does not suggest the use of force or other means to compel the master to submit to the demands of the servant. But on the contrary, it points to the obedience to both the good and gentle, and also to the froward or perverse master. Because of the master's position of authority, the servant must also obey. He may not use the injustice of his master as an excuse for disobedience.

This is, perhaps, one of the hardest lessons for the Christian to learn in our own day of easy rebellion and disobedience. Within the realm of daily labors, it is seldom heard anymore that a worker would be obedient to his boss--whether that man were good and gentle or if he were perverse. Today the attitude is: we must strike. We must demand our "rights". We must show the employer who is the boss. Yet the Christian may not join in this. His life on this earth is truly different from those about him. And if such a life generates mockery and scorn, yet the child of God knows that he is in obedience to the demands of this Word of God.

Verses 19 and 20 suggest that this way of obedience is that which is "thankworthy", or, literally, the fruit of God's favor or grace. It is correctly emphasized that one who suffers for his faults or sins, and bears such patiently, can hardly be praised. He deserved what he received. If he then is patient during the time of his punishment, perhaps imprisonment, such is no more than one should expect.

But children of God so often must suffer wrongfully. That is true when governments mistreat or persecute them. That is true when their masters or employers seek to take advantage of the Christian who willingly performs his labors. Such an one often suffers. Some have been imprisoned or put to death because they were faithful and maintained the Word of God. And the child of God who patiently endures through all of this, surely shows the fruit of God's grace in him.

And that is some standard to measure up to! Who of us are so willing to obey the Word of God that we are ready to suffer consequences rather than rebel against instituted authority? How often is this kind of obedience even seen within the churches? Do not we also, Christians, too often insist on our "rights" rather than walking in obedience to the Word of God--even if we suffer for it?

Yet such obedience is acceptable with God. Obedience does not earn or merit anything from God, but it is pleasing in God's sight. Then, be obedient to God above all, and to those in authority for God's sake.

The last verses in the chapter, 21-24, point us to the example, the glorious example, and the basis for our own walk in holiness. We are reminded of the suffering of Jesus. Far too often, we would complain that the suffering required of Christians is too much to expect. We don't want imprisonment; we don't want to lose our jobs or our families. We don't even want to be laughed at. We want to be part of the "gang", accepted of men.

Yet, what is the suffering of children of God, compared to that which Christ had to face for their sakes? First, He had to bear our sins, the guilt of the sins of His people, on the cross. No man can pay for his own sins. Only Jesus, Who is the Son of God in our flesh, can do that. And He did. He came into our flesh when He was born in the manger in Bethlehem. Through all of His life, He had to face the mockery and scorn of sinners. Finally, He faced the indignity of being crucified on the cross. It was the death assigned to the worst of criminals. It was the sign of the curse of God--for it suspended one between heaven and earth. This indicated that one was rejected of God and man. And Christ was so crucified even unto death. He shed His own blood, thus giving His life, for the sins of His people. This is what God required in order to deliver His people from the curse and hell.

This is what Christ had to endure. Already in the Old Testament, this wonderful

sacrifice was foretold. The last part of verse 24 quotes from Isaiah 53:5 "...and by His stripes we are healed." These stripes were those placed upon Him during His trial before Pilate. And those stripes include, figuratively, the suffering unto death on the cross. By these stripes His people are healed. They are delivered from the curse and from death. Christ's payment on the cross was enough to satisfy God's justice. Thus: by His stripes we are healed.

But the wonder of all of this is: He Who so suffered was Himself without sin, vs. 22. Every man really deserves whatever might befall him. He sinned before God and deserves the worst of punishments. But not so the Christ. He was without sin and without guile.

This is possible first because Jesus is Himself God. Scripture teaches this so very clearly. John 1 emphasizes not only that Jesus, the Word, was with God, but He was God. So also the Jews would kill Jesus because they claimed He made himself to be God--an accusation which Christ never denied. As God, He did not sin, and could not sin. God is perfect and holy. There is no darkness in Him at all. And Jesus, the second Person of the Trinity, also then partakes of this same perfection. He never sinned once. He never spake in an evil or sinful way. He never did anything that was contrary to the law of God. He was obedient even unto death.

Secondly, this sinlessness of Christ can be seen in light of the Scriptural fact that He was born of the virgin Mary. This birth was without the will of a man, for conception was through the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35). Somehow, through this sort of conception, Christ was born without the guilt of our first father, Adam. Scripture teaches that in Adam's sin, all men died (Romans 5). But Christ was exempt because He was born without the will of man. He was born sinless therefore and never sinned through His entire life.

And the significance of all of this is, that Jesus did not suffer in any way because of His own sins. One punished because he is guilty, has this coming to him. But one who is ready and willing to bear punishment, who himself is innocent, is a wonder too great for us to understand fully. Jesus was reviled--but did not return that. He was threatened, but did not threaten in return. And remember, He could call thousands of angels to His defence--but did not in order to pay for the sins of His people. Isaiah says, in chapter 53,

that He was led as a lamb to the slaughter and as a sheep before the shearers is dumb, so He opened not His mouth.

Jesus was perfectly obedient even unto death. He committed Himself to God Who judgeth righteously. The righteous judgment of God fell on Jesus Who took our guilt upon Himself.

That is the wonder of grace. That is the heart of the gospel and must be the central element in all preaching. Christ was faithful and diligent even unto death itself. None can duplicate such perfect obedience, for none is perfect as He was.

And this is also for our example. Are we going to complain? Do we have to face too much suffering and affliction? Has God forgotten to be kind? Are the temptations apparently too great to bear? But before any would say this, let him remember Jesus the Lord. Who was perfect as He was, yet ready to suffer such great affliction? And who has ever endured the kind of suffering which Jesus had to face? Who has faced the terrors of hell under the wrath of God?

Knowing all of this, we ought to be ashamed that we should ever complain before God. We might insist that we must face more suffering than the average. We might insist that our suffering is not just or fair. But what about that which Jesus had to endure? Did any suffer as did He? Did any deserve suffering less than He? And all this suffering He bore not for himself, but for His people--to deliver them from sin and death.

Then we ought also to follow that example of Christ. We can not through our suffering make any kind of payment for our sins. Christ already made the full payment necessary before God. But His worthy example ought to be incentive to us to walk in all godliness in this earth. If He so suffered for me, ought not I be ready and willing to suffer for His Name's sake? Of course.

At the same time, let us understand that Christ's suffering and death also made possible my obedience before God. His suffering was not merely for an example to show to us how one ought to suffer stoically. Rather, because He redeemed His people, because He calls them from darkness to the light, therefore they can be obedient even in the face of great persecution and suffering. For by His stripes WE ARE HEALED. Then we can and do serve God regardless of the consequences. We will not take the easy answers of wicked men who would have us continue in rebellion against God. But by His grace, we will serve Him already now, as we shall to all eternity in heaven.