

YOUR CHRISTIAN DUTY

1 ¹⁴As obedient children, no longer conform to the passions you formerly had when you lived in ignorance. ¹⁵But just as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, ¹⁶because it is written, "Be holy, because I am holy." ¹⁷And if you call upon the Father who judges impartially according to each one's work, live your remaining time [on earth] in fear, ¹⁸knowing that you were redeemed from your futile way of life handed down from your forefathers—not by perishable things, such as silver or gold, ¹⁹but with precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish or defect, [the blood] of Christ. ²⁰He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for you, ²¹[you] who through him are believers in God who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope may be in God.

²²Since you have, by obedience to the truth, purified your souls for a sincere love of [your] brothers, earnestly love one another from the heart, ²³having been born again. [Your rebirth was] not by means of perishable seed, but [by one that is] imperishable: the living and enduring word of God; ²⁴for [it is written], "All flesh is like grass and all their glory is like the flower of the grass. The grass withers and the flower falls; ²⁵but the word of the LORD endures forever." And this is the word that was preached to you. **2**Therefore, getting rid of all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy, and envy and all slander, ²earnestly desire the pure spiritual milk, like new born infants, so that by it you may grow in your salvation—³if "you have tasted [and found] that the LORD is good." (1 Pet. 1:14-2:3)

Introduction

In the early days of television, there was a popular detective program called, *Dragnet*. The program featured Sgt. Joe Friday and his partner, Frank Smith. Week by week the show presented actual cases from the files of the Los Angeles police department. Sgt. Friday and his partner were good, conscientious police officers who always carried out their job in a straightforward, matter of fact way.

Whenever they would be hassled by an irate citizen, asking, "Why are you guys snooping around here, asking all these questions? Why are you poking your noses into my business?" The two of them would always answer in a matter of fact tone, "It's our duty."

Whenever they were praised by a thankful and relieved citizen who was happy to have his stolen goods recovered and have the criminal put behind bars, the two of them would always reply in a matter of fact tone, "We're just doing our duty."

Sgt. Friday and his partner, Frank Smith, were good cops—without fanfare and without complaint, they carried out their responsibilities, they did their duty.

Now if the Apostle Peter ever got the opportunity to watch that T.V. program, *Dragnet*, and see Sgt. Friday and Frank Smith carrying out their police duties, he would say, "There is a good example of what you as a Christian should be doing!"

Scripture teaches us that Christian people have God-given duties we are obligated to fulfill—not as civil servants, but as children of God. Three such duties are presented to us in this passage of 1 Peter.

I. It is Your Christian Duty to Be Holy in Every Part of Life

Having been born again by the Spirit of God and thus having become a child of God in Christ Jesus, we must now conduct ourselves *“as obedient children.”* That is to say, we must conduct ourselves as children whose lives are characterized by obedience, like the eternal Son of God Himself. The Lord Jesus declared, *“The one who sent me is with me; he has not forsaken me; because I always do the things that are pleasing to him”* (Jn. 8:29.)

What it means to be *“obedient children”* is first defined in negative terms: do not allow yourself to any longer be guided by and conformed to your former lusts. Prior to conversion there was the casual, careless indulgence—sometimes the intense pursuit—of the lusts of the world. The life prior to conversion was a life that was governed by impulse and guided by the crowd, as Peter reminds his readers:

You have spent enough time in the past doing what the Gentiles choose to do: living for debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing, and detestable idolatry. ⁴Engaged in such a lifestyle, they think that it is strange for you not to plunge with them into the same flood of dissolute living, so they malign you. (1 Pet. 4:3-4)

But now, having become a child of God, we must no longer allow our lives to be brought into conformity with the lifestyle and the attitudes of a pagan world: self-centered, defiant of authority, unrestrained, irresponsible. On the contrary, it is now our Christian duty to bring our lives into conformity with the will of God and the example of Christ our Savior: self-giving, self-denying, submissive to authority, self-controlled, responsible. As the Apostle Peter exhorts us as Christians:

Therefore, since Christ suffered in the flesh, also fortify yourselves with the same attitude, because he who suffered in the flesh is done with sin. ²As a result, he does not live the remainder of his earthly life for [evil] human desires, but for the will of God. (1 Pet. 4:1-2)

Summing up in positive terms what it means to be *“obedient children,”* Peter declares, *“Be holy.”* Note that this is a process, Peter’s command may more accurately be translated, *“Become holy”*—it is the spiritual process that the Bible defines as sanctification. Sanctification is the process carried on in the life of the Christian by the Holy Spirit, but it is a process in which the Christian himself is actively involved, note Philippians 2:12b-13, *“continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³for it is God who is working in you both to create the*

desire and to produce the work for the sake of his good purpose." God creates both the desire and the obedience, and we are to yield ourselves to Him as He carries out this work in the lives of His children. This process of sanctification extends to every part of life; Peter urges us to *"become holy in all your conduct:"* business and recreation, social and intellectual pursuits. The Apostle Paul tells the Christian that we are to *"take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ"* (2 Cor.10:5.)

In verse 16 Peter appeals to the Old Testament Scriptures as a means of reinforcing the call to holy living in every part of life. The argument of Scripture is this: holiness is commanded by God because holiness is conformity to the character of God.

The call to holy living is followed by the command to *"live your remaining time [on earth] in fear"* (vs. 17.) That is to say, during the remainder of our life on earth we are to consciously entertain a holy, reverential fear of God. A reverential fear of God is appropriate in this present age until that time when the love for God has been perfected in us. A perfect love for God will manifest itself in willing obedience, an obedience that no longer needs to be prodded by means of fearing the consequences of disobedience. The perfect expression of love for God will express itself in perfect obedience, the perfect compliance to Christ's desire: *"If you love me, you will keep my commandments"* (Jn. 14:15.) But until that time, there is the need for a reverential fear of God as a stimulus to obedience and a deterrent to sin. Through the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah, the LORD declares, *"I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from following them, to do them good; and I will put my fear in their hearts, that they may not depart from me"* (Jer. 32:40.)

Note that Scripture does not set the fear of God in opposition to the love of God; on the contrary, the very One towards whom the Christian is to entertain a reverential fear is the One whom he calls "Father." It is the heavenly Father who is also the divine Judge; and the righteous Father carries out that divine work of judgment without partiality. This causes the Christian to respect his heavenly Father with a deep and sacred fear, as opposed to taking an unholy advantage of his position as a child of God.

It is our Christian duty to be—and to become—holy in every part of our lives. As the Apostle Paul informs the church in Thessalonica, *"It is God's will that you should be holy ... ⁷God did not call us for impurity, but to live a holy life"* (1 Thess. 4:3a, 7.) The writer to the Hebrews exhorts us, *"Follow after peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no man shall see the Lord"* (Heb. 12:14.)

II. It is Your Christian Duty to Love One Another from the Heart

Peter informs us that one of the reasons we have been redeemed is for the purpose of practicing brotherly love towards fellow believers in Christ: *"you*

have ... purified your souls for a sincere love of your brothers” (1:22.) Furthermore, the fact that we have been born again by the Spirit of God is what creates a spiritual affinity between believers and the ability to express brotherly love for them: *“earnestly love one another from the heart, ²³having been born again” (1:22-23.)* The Apostle John exhorts us: *“Beloved, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love” (1 Jn. 4:7-8.)* Again, he teaches, *“This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother” (1 Jn. 3:10.)*

Although it is the redeeming grace of God that creates the ability to love our Christian brothers and sisters, we need to be exhorted to actually practice this brotherly love: *“Since you have ... purified your souls for a sincere love of your brothers, earnestly love one another from the heart” (1:22.)* Again, the Apostle John presents this same theme: *“Beloved, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God” (1 Jn. 4:7.)*

Thus, this Christian love must not remain as a mere potential, it must be expressed, and it must be expressed *“from the heart.”* That is to say, our lives must be characterized by sincere, earnest, genuine love for one another as brothers and sisters in Christ; as opposed to there being merely a superficial “love” that is really only a matter of good manners and social etiquette.

How are we to express this love for one another in practical terms? We express love for one another by extending forgiveness towards each other and by exercising forbearance:

Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. ¹⁴And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. (Col. 3:12-14)

We express love for one another by caring for one another’s physical and spiritual well-being:

If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? ¹⁸Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. (1 Jn. 3:17-18)

Bear one another’s burdens, and by doing so you will fulfill the law of Christ. (Gal. 6:2)

A description of Christian love is given in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7,

Love is patient. Love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not arrogant. ⁵It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it does not keep a record of wrongs. ⁶It does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth. ⁷It forgives all things, it believes all things, it hopes all things, it endures all things. (1 Cor. 13:4-7)

It is our Christian duty to love one another from the heart, expressing that love with practical concern for one another's spiritual and physical well-being.

III. It is Your Christian Duty to Drink in the Word of God for Spiritual Growth

The Apostle Peter compares the Christian to a newborn babe. One characteristic of an infant is his desire for the nourishment of his mother's milk. In a similar way, we are instructed to desire "*the pure spiritual milk*" (i.e.; the Word of God.)

We are to avail ourselves of this pure spiritual milk "*so that by it you may grow in [our] salvation*" (2:2.) The infant naturally desires his mother's milk, and that milk becomes the nourishment that sustains his life and furthers his growth. The same holds true for us as Christians: we are to sustain and cultivate our spiritual life, and we do so by means of the Word of God. Spiritual growth comes as a result of exposure to the Word of God and response to that divine Word, note James 1:22-25,

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. ²³Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror ²⁴and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. ²⁵But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does. (Jas. 1:22-25)

It is our Christian duty to drink in the Word of God for our spiritual growth. We should view it as part of our covenant responsibility to spend time in the Scriptures, note, for example, Deuteronomy 17:18-20 and Deuteronomy 6:6-7,

When [the king] takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law, taken from that of the priests, who are Levites. ¹⁹It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere Jehovah his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees ²⁰and not consider himself better than his brothers and turn from the law to the right or to the left. Then he and his descendants will reign a long time over his kingdom in Israel. (Deut. 17:18-20)

These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. ⁷Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and

when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. (Deut. 6:6-7)

Conclusion

If the Apostle Peter ever got the chance to watch the old T.V. show, *Dragnet*, he would have loved those two Los Angeles policemen, Sgt. Friday and his partner, Frank Smith, because they conscientiously carried out their assigned duties. Seeing those two in action, Peter would say, “There are two good examples of what you as a Christian should be doing!”

The Bible teaches that Christian people have God-given duties which we are expected to fulfill—not as civil servants, but as faithful children of God.