

THE IMPORTANCE OF A GODLY LIFE

2¹¹ Beloved, I exhort you as aliens and refugees, to abstain from the fleshly lusts that wage war against the soul. ¹²Conduct yourselves in a proper way among the Gentiles; so that, even though they slander you as evil doers, by observing your good works they must glorify God on the day of his visitation. (1 Pet. 2:11-12)

Introduction

Back in the mid-nineties, a commentator wrote about the S&L crisis—the Savings and Loan crisis. He remarked that the savings and loan business in the United States was in serious trouble in recent years; many offices had closed, others were struggling to survive. He went on to point out that a number of factors had contributed to create this crisis: a slowdown in the economy, poor management, excessive salaries, and bad investments. For those who lost their savings, the S&L crisis was a real tragedy.

The author of this article then went on to speak about another “S&L crisis.” He noted that as disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ we are called by Him to be Salt and Light in a morally decaying world that is engulfed in spiritual darkness. When we allow compromise, selfishness, or deceit to dominate our lives, we create another kind of “S&L crisis,” one that has far more tragic consequences than those caused by the savings and loan crisis (*Our Daily Bread*, 12/31/92.)

Rather than viewing our everyday conduct as merely a matter of personal preference and little spiritual consequence, we must realize the importance of leading a godly life. We must heed the exhortation of Scripture to lead a godly life because of the importance of such a life both for ourselves and for our God.

I. Lead a Godly Life, ...for the Sake of Your Soul

The Apostle Peter here addresses the Christians to whom he writes with a great deal of tenderness and empathy: *“Beloved, I exhort you ... to abstain from fleshly lusts.”* Peter knows that we are constantly confronted with a world—a society and culture—that is filled with all kinds of seductive temptations. We may also take note of the Apostle John’s evaluation of the world: *“everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world”* (1 Jn. 2:16.) *“The cravings of sinful man”* refer to the physical desires, the temptations to gratify the passions of the body; included here are such sins as sexual immorality, drunkenness, gluttony, drug abuse, laziness, etc. *“The lust of his eyes”* refer to the mental desires, the temptations to indulge the passions of the heart; included here are especially such sins as covetousness and materialism. *“Boasting”* (or, *“the vain glory of life,”*) is a reference to the various forms of the sin of pride: self-centeredness, self-exaltation, and self-seeking.

Peter knows from personal experience how vulnerable we are to this vast array of seductive temptations. Peter was very sincere about his commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ, and he was highly confident of his ability to maintain that commitment in the face of temptation. When the Lord Jesus foretold Peter's denial, Peter responded by protesting, "*Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death*" (Lk. 22:33.) But when he was actually confronted with the temptation, he discovered how weak he was, how vulnerable; he was swept away by the power of the temptation:

Then seizing [Jesus], they led him away and took him into the house of the high priest. Peter followed at a distance. ⁵⁵But when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter sat down with them. ⁵⁶A servant girl saw him seated there in the firelight. She looked closely at him and said, This man was with him. ⁵⁷But he denied it. Woman, I do not know him, he said. ⁵⁸A little later someone else saw him and said, You also are one of them. Man, I am not! Peter replied. ⁵⁹About an hour later another asserted, Certainly this fellow was with him, for he is a Galilean. ⁶⁰Peter replied, Man, I do not know what you are talking about! Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. ⁶¹The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times. ⁶²And he went outside and wept bitterly. (Lk. 22:54-62)

Consider, also, the testimony of the Apostle Paul:

... in my inner being I delight in God's law; ²³but I see another principle at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. ²⁴What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? (Rom. 7:22-24)

But the Apostle Peter not only addresses us with a great deal of tenderness and empathy, he at the same time addresses us with the urgency and the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. The recognition of the vast array of worldly lusts we encounter and our susceptibility to them do not qualify as excuses to yield to such temptations, as the Apostle Paul warns: "*if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die*" (Rom. 8:13a.) We need also to take to heart the warnings issued in such passages as the following:

Do you not realize that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor male prostitutes, nor those who practice homosexuality, ¹⁰nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor slanderers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Cor. 6:9-10)

Now the works of the sinful nature are well-known, [such as:] sexual immorality, moral impurity, debauchery, ²⁰idolatry, witchcraft, hatreds,

discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, ²¹envy, drunkenness, orgies, and other such things. I warn you [again], just as I [previously] warned you, that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. (Gal. 5:19-21)

Indeed, the recognition of the vast array of worldly lusts we encounter and our susceptibility to them do not qualify as excuses to yield to such temptations; on the contrary, these factors are the reasons that convince us that we cannot rely upon ourselves, we must take refuge in Christ and rely upon His Holy Spirit in order to maintain and cultivate our Christian life. In Romans 8:13 (a passage quoted above,) the Apostle Paul goes on to write: *“if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.”* The writer to the Hebrews provides this assurance and directive: *“Because [Christ] himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted”* (Heb. 2:18.)

Peter urges and exhorts us to abstain from worldly lusts because we no longer belong to the world. We have become children of God and citizens of His holy kingdom, and we must conduct ourselves accordingly, note Galatians 1:4, *“the Lord Jesus Christ ⁴ ... gave himself for our sins, so that he might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father.”* Referring to this present world as “Babylon,” the angel of the Lord commands God’s people, *“Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues; ⁵for her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes”* (Rev. 18:4-5.)

Furthermore, Peter exhorts us to abstain from worldly lusts because they *“wage war against the soul.”* This spiritual warfare is often times more comparable to the type of guerrilla warfare conducted in the jungles of Viet Nam, rather than the type of warfare conducted in the American Revolutionary War with the British “Red Coats” clearly visible as the opposing army. The Apostle Paul reminds us that our enemy, the devil, is very subtle and cunning: *“I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent’s cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ”* (2 Cor. 11:3.)

We must appreciate the fact that there is no neutrality in this spiritual warfare: *“You adulterous people, do you not know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God”* (Jas. 4:4.) The Lord Jesus declares, *“He who is not with me is against me”* (Matt. 12:30a.) As Christians living in this present world, we find ourselves living in a spiritual war zone in which there is no neutrality and in which our very soul is at stake.

Let us lead a godly life, for the sake of our soul. One observer noted that so many contemporary arguments against promiscuous sex or drug use are simply an appeal to take care of our bodies: If you are not careful, you may contract a

sexually-transmitted disease, or you might “fry” your brain if you engage in the use of drugs (*WORLD*, 1/23/89, p. 8.) But the Word of God, as presented here by the Apostle Peter, argues that worldly lusts (of any and every variety) are bad for the **soul**: they wage war against our souls. We must not merely think about maintaining life and the quality of life only in the physical and earthly sense, we must expand our horizons and broaden our perspective: we must consider where we are going to spend eternity, in heaven or in hell, we must think about the spiritual effects and consequences of worldly lusts upon our spiritual life. The Lord declares,

He who overcomes shall inherit these things [i.e.; the blessings of the kingdom of God], *and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.* ⁸*But the cowardly and the unfaithful and the detestable and murderers and the sexually immoral and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars—their place shall be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.* (Rev. 21:7-8)

II. Lead a Godly Life, ...for the Sake of Your God

As a Christian, you must not only take into consideration yourself and your own soul, beyond that, you must take into consideration the glory of God, thus Peter writes, *"Beloved, I exhort you as aliens and refugees, to abstain from the fleshly lusts ... so that, even though they slander you as evildoers, by observing your good works they must glorify God on the day of his visitation."*

Let us consider and take to heart the testimony of Scripture as to our Christian calling:

You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵*Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.* ¹⁶*In the same way, let your light shine before men, so that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.* (Matt. 5:14-16)

Let us consider, too, the blasphemous effects of an inconsistent Christian life, something for which the Apostle Paul rebukes the people of Israel: *"You who boast about the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law?"* ²⁴*As it is written: God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you"* (Rom. 2:23-24.)

Let us consider the following testimony and conduct our Christian lives in the light of it:

One of the biggest struggles I had with Christianity was with Christians who kept blocking my view of Jesus. I came to faith when I finally met some people in whom I could clearly see Jesus Christ for the first time. (*POWER*, 6/21/92, p. 7)

Peter reminds the church that the Gentiles, (here to be taken as a reference to the unbelieving community at large rather than referring to ethnic non-Jews,) "*slander you as evil doers.*" That is to say, the unbelieving community was accusing these Christian people of being trouble makers, of disturbing the peace and upsetting the unity of the empire and the solidarity of the society. In the first centuries of the New Testament era, Christians were thrown to the lions and executed by the Roman authorities not so much because they worshiped Jesus, but because they refused to worship the emperor, declaring that Jesus is Lord—they were viewed as being disruptive to the unity of the empire and a threat to the absolute sovereignty of the Roman state. As the Christian life is lived out it is seen to be a radical lifestyle, one that stands against the unholy current of this world, one that stands in opposition to the humanistic solidarity of the world in its united opposition to the God of heaven. Consequently, the expression of Christian living is perceived to be a threat to a hedonistic society and a "hindrance" to social progress towards a unified humanistic utopia.

But at the same time that these "Gentiles" are accusing the Christian community of being "*evil doers*" (or, troublemakers,) they are also "*observing your good works.*" As the Holy Spirit bears His godly fruit in our lives, our very presence becomes both a conviction to the world and a wonder to the world: The Christian is different! He is uncomfortably different! But at the same time, he is honorably different! Consider the impact a Christian girl's life and testimony had upon her fellow worker, as that worker relates her testimony:

Everyone in our office knew this girl was different. She had something I didn't have. I didn't know what it was, but I wanted it. My friends didn't have it. In fact, compared to this girl, they and I became ugly in my sight. This girl's daily life convicted me. Yes, something was wrong—not with her, but with me and my friends. (*POWER*, 4/18/93, p. 7)

Whether we realize it or not, as Christians, our lives are under daily observation and scrutiny by the unbelieving community around us. They are searching for answers, and at the same time they are looking for inconsistencies in our Christian life so as to dismiss us and thereby avoid the convicting work of the Holy Spirit as He works in us and bears His witness through us. Therefore, because the world is watching, we are exhorted to conduct our lives in an honorable manner—for the glory of God: "*Conduct yourselves in a proper way among the Gentiles; so that, even though they slander you as evildoers, by observing your good works they must glorify God on the day of his visitation*" (vs. 12.) Note, also, the Apostle Paul's exhortation to the Philippian church:

Do all things without grumbling and arguing, ¹⁵so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without blemish, in the midst of a perverse and depraved generation, among whom you shine like stars in the universe, ¹⁶firmly holding the word of life. (Phil. 2:14-16a)

Note: This consideration to lead an honorable, godly life before the world for the glory of God must have its affect upon our private life as well as our public life, for what is entertained in the heart cannot be contained within the heart, eventually it will be revealed in the conduct of the life. Proverbs 14:14a informs us, *“The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways.”* The point of Proverbs 14:14a is that sin cultivated in the heart shall finally dominate the life. By way of illustration: A seedling is planted, it germinates, it sprouts roots, and some time later it breaks through the surface of the ground and comes to full fruition. So it is with the sin that is cultivated in the heart, eventually it will dominate the whole life and become evident to all, it cannot remain hidden. In light of this truth, let us join the Psalmist in making his prayer: *“Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. ²⁴See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting”* (Psl. 139:23-24.)

Let us lead a godly life, for the sake of our God. Our lives should be a testimony that we belong to the Lord Jesus Christ and that He is living in us by His Holy Spirit; so that the world will finally be compelled to give glory to God for what they have seen.

Conclusion

Let us not accept the lie that our everyday conduct and lifestyle is merely a matter of personal preference and is of no spiritual significance. On the contrary, may we realize the importance of leading a consistently Christ-like life. By the grace of God, let us heed the commandment of Scripture to lead a godly life, not only for the sake of our own souls, but for the glory of the Lord our God.