

1 Peter 2:11-12

Introduction

This morning, we come to the main body of Peter's letter. In the opening of his letter, we could say that there were four parts. There was the greeting, which sets the tone for the rest of the letter.

- 1 Peter 2:1-2 — Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To the chosen, who are resident foreigners of the Dispersion of Pontus, of Galatia, of Cappadocia, of Asia, and of Bithynia, [chosen] according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, [chosen] in the sanctification of the Spirit, [chosen] for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: May grace and peace be multiplied to you.

After the greeting, there was the “indicative,” where Peter celebrates all that God has already done for His chosen people.

- 1 Peter 2:3 — Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his abounding mercies, has begotten us anew to a living hope...

After ten verses of this indicative (2:3-12), Peter gives us five imperatives (1:13-2:3) – how things ought to be and must be in light of how things are.

- 1 Peter 1:13 — Set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.
- 1 Peter 1:15 — Be holy in all your conduct.
- 1 Peter 1:17 — Conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your sojourning.
- 1 Peter 1:22 — Love one another unwaveringly from a pure heart.
- 1 Peter 2:2 — Like newborn infants, crave the spiritual, pure milk.

After the opening greeting, and then the indicative of God's mercies, and then the five imperatives, Peter concludes by focusing on our true **identity** as a people. (2:4-10) We are those who have come to Christ, “a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and honored.” And so now we share **with Christ** in being rejected **by men**, but favored and honored **by God**. And remember just **how** favored and honored we are!

- 1 Peter 2:9-10 — You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

So that's the conclusion to the opening section, but Peter has already been transitioning into the next section—the “main body”—of his letter. Having been reminded that our lot will be one of **rejection by this world**, and having been reminded of our identity **as a people in this world**, we're ready to be reminded, now, of how we should live specifically in **relationship to** this

world. (2:13-4:11) The two verses we'll be looking at this morning introduce this new theme and the entire main body of the letter. So Peter begins:

I. 1 Peter 2:1a — Beloved, I urge you...

See how Peter, with all the authority of God's word, still appeals to his readers earnestly as those that he loves! The Apostle Paul writes in 2 Corinthians chapter 10:

➤ 2 Corinthians 10:1 — I, Paul, myself urge you, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ...

Because Peter loves his readers and because they're dear to him as his own brothers and sisters—this is why he entreats them so earnestly. So aren't we inclined all the more to listen to what Peter will say? Even as Peter is speaking with the full authority of God's Word, he comes to us with the meekness and gentleness of Christ. And here's also an example for others who are in any place of spiritual authority with responsibility for the souls of others. Our words and our actions should always be expressive of these words: "Beloved, I urge you..."

So Peter writes to us and he says:

II. 1 Peter 2:11 — Beloved, I urge you as sojourners [*paroikos*] and foreigners [*parepidemos*]...

Remember how Peter began his letter:

➤ 1 Peter 1:1 — To the chosen, who are **foreigners** [*parepidemos*] of the Dispersion...

And then remember what Peter wrote later on in chapter one:

➤ 1 Peter 1:17 — Conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your **sojourning** [*paroikia*]...

So now Peter takes these same two words—"sojourners" and "foreigners"—and puts them together to emphasize as strongly as possible our lack of belonging in this world: "Beloved, I urge you as sojourners [*paroikos*] and foreigners [*parepidemos*]." We find these same two words also in Genesis chapter 23:

➤ Genesis 23:1-4 (cf. LXX)¹ — Sarah died... and Abraham went in to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her. And Abraham rose up from before his dead and said to the Hittites, "I am a sojourner [*paroikos*] and foreigner [*parepidemos*] among you; give me property among you for a burying place."

Abraham's life as a sojourner and a foreigner among the inhabitants of Canaan is a picture of our own sojourning today as foreigners in this world. **If** we are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and a people for God's own special possession as we saw last week in verses 9 and 10, **then we must also be** in relation to this world strangers who don't belong. Peter's point isn't

¹ Cf. Psalm 39:12 — Hear my prayer, O LORD, and give ear to my cry; hold not your peace at my tears! For I am a sojourner [*paroikos*] with you, a guest [*parepidemos*], like all my fathers.

that we don't belong on this earth, but rather that we're strangers in a world opposed to God – one that doesn't bow the knee to Jesus Christ. In light of who we are, and in light of what the world is, we can have no true sense of “*belonging*” here. And the sooner we come to terms with this and really get a grip on this, the better off we'll be.

But what does this really mean? What are the practical implications of this truth?

III. 1 Peter 2:11 — Beloved, I urge you *AS sojourners* and [*AS*] **foreigners** to **abstain from the cravings of the flesh, which wage war against your soul...**

This is language that was actually already common in Greek philosophy, so it was familiar even to many pagans. Over four hundred years earlier, Plato wrote in his dialogue, “Phaedo”:

“No one who has not been a philosopher and who is not wholly pure when he departs, is allowed to enter into the communion of the gods, but only the lover of knowledge. It is for this reason... that **those who truly love wisdom refrain from all bodily desires [cravings] and resist them firmly and do not give themselves up to them...**” (Plato; quoted in Watson)

In case we think Plato is irrelevant to our world today, listen to what some have said about Plato's philosophy:

“Together with Socrates and Aristotle, Plato laid the philosophical **foundations of Western culture**. The father of Western philosophy, **Plato has influenced every era in the 23 centuries since he lived**. He has been praised as ‘the **substance of Western thought**,’ ‘one of the supreme poets of the world,’ and ‘the **paragon of excellence emulated by high-minded men for over two thousand years**.’”²

That's pretty high praise for someone who was an idolater and a hater of God. But even today, Plato's ideas are actually being welcomed into the church under the guise of so-called “meditation” and communing with God and hearing the voice of God within us.

Plato taught all sorts of things that were completely opposed to God's word. He “believed that the soul was fundamentally pure [contrary to the doctrine of original sin and total depravity] but becomes deformed through association with the body [contrary to the doctrine of the goodness of God's physical creation and the resurrection of the body]. Despite this [deformity, the soul] retains something of its true nature – and shows this through longing for wisdom.”³

So what was “wisdom” for Plato?

“When returning into herself [from the outside world of the senses into the internal world of ideas] . . . [the soul] passes into the other world, the region of purity, and eternity, and immortality, and unchangeableness, which are her kindred, and with them she ever lives, when she is by herself and is not... hindered; then she ceases from her erring ways, and

² www.tm.org/blog/enlightenment/plato-and-this-state-of-the-soul-is-called-wisdom/

³ www.scandalon.co.uk/philosophy/plato_immortality_soul.htm

being in communion with the unchanging is unchanging. And this state of the soul is called wisdom... The soul is in the very likeness of the divine, and immortal, and intellectual, and uniform, and indissoluble, and unchangeable.” (Phaedo)

So, to put that in plain English, for Plato, “wisdom” was not the fear of the Lord, as it is in Scripture, but the realization of our own deity. So he also denies the biblical distinction between the creature and the Creator. Finally, how did Plato teach that we should pursue this “so-called” wisdom? “It involved years of study[ing]... **living a life of virtue**... five years rigorous dialectical discussion . . . years of service to the state . . . and only after all of this would a few select people be... worthy of receiving the final stroke of knowledge.”⁴ Even though Plato denied any doctrine of a final judgment, he still taught a kind of “salvation” by works. In order to attain true “wisdom” and in order to fully realize our divinity we must live lives of **virtue** and **self-control**; we must “refrain from all bodily cravings and resist them firmly and... not give [ourselves] up to them...”

So are you seeing this tension? Plato has denied every major doctrine of the Christian faith. Plato has denied the one true God and deified man in His place. Plato is a hater of God in every way. And yet there’s a sense in which Plato comes to the exact same conclusion as the Apostle Peter does some 400 years later when Peter writes to us to “abstain from the cravings of the flesh, which wage war against [our souls]...”

There’s the obvious similarity, but let’s look a little closer at the differences. For Peter, we’re not saved by our own wisdom but because we’ve been chosen by God and appointed to salvation through His Son Jesus Christ. For Peter, our **souls** are not what we escape *into* in order to find “salvation.” Instead:

- 1 Peter 1:8–9 — ...you love [Christ], and... believe in him and rejoice greatly with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the **salvation of your souls**.”

For Peter, our souls are *not* fundamentally pure so that they only need to be rescued from the outside influences of the body. Instead, he writes in chapter one verse 22 of our need to have our souls purified by our obedience to the truth.

- 1 Peter 1:22 — Having **purified your souls by your obedience to the truth**...

And finally, when Peter talks about our souls, he’s not leaving out our bodies.

- 1 Peter 1:22 — Through [Christ you] are believers in God, the one who **raised [Jesus] from the dead** and the one who gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

For Peter, the salvation of our soul is the salvation of our whole person – so that even our bodies will one day be resurrected from the dead. Can you see how Peter and Plato are moving in completely different worlds? And isn’t it wonderful to have the sure foundation of the truths of

⁴ www.tm.org/blog/enlightenment/plato-and-this-state-of-the-soul-is-called-wisdom/

God's Word – of all the beautiful teachings and doctrines of the Gospel? The Gospel destroys the very foundations of everything Plato believed and taught.

And yet we do have this one similarity. Plato, the so-called “philosopher” writes: “Refrain from all bodily cravings and resist them firmly and do not give [yourselves] up to them.” And Peter, the Apostle of Jesus Christ writes: “Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and foreigners to abstain [or refrain] from the cravings of the flesh, which wage war against your soul...”

Plato built up an entire system of false beliefs in order to justify and motivate his pursuit of what he knew to be right and true: a virtuous and self-controlled life. In the Bible, we are called to this same virtuous and self-controlled life,⁵ but built on an entirely different—and **OPPOSITE**—foundation – the foundation of the Gospel. And **this** difference really is **all the difference in the world**. It's specifically and consciously upon the foundation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and all of **its** doctrines and teachings that we are to diligently abstain each day from all the cravings of the flesh.

So what are these cravings of the flesh? Peter says that these are the things that wage war against our souls – against our final well-being and salvation on the day of judgment. He writes in chapter four:

- **1 Peter 4:1–4** — Whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human cravings but for the will of God. For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry.

And right away, aren't we wondering what in the world happened to the self-control, and the virtue, and the “wisdom” of Plato? Not everyone lives according to their own ideals. In most every society you're going to have the Plato's and the philosophers (in other words the good and the virtuous and the self-controlled), and also the unbridled drunkards and pleasure seekers, and also everyone else in between. But Peter knows that what all these different kinds of people have in common is a recognition of what the ideal is — they all know the true “goodness” of virtue and self-control. And it's in that light that we need to read what Peter says next: “Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and foreigners to abstain from the cravings of the flesh, which wage war against your soul...”

IV. 1 Peter 2:12 — ...keeping your conduct [*anastrophe*] among the Gentiles good [*kalos*], so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good [*kalos*] deeds and give glory to God on the day of visitation.

You see, the Gentiles know what is “good.” And what's more, many of the Gentiles even **do** what is good. Most of us probably have more philosophers for neighbors than we do unbridled drunkards and pleasure-seekers. Peter knows that the values and conduct of the pagan culture can overlap with the values and conduct of our own Christian faith, (cf. Jobes) and so **there are**

⁵ Cf. 1 Peter 4:7; Titus 2:1-14

pagans who *do* live genuinely “good” lives of virtue and self-control.⁶ But if this virtue and self-control is built on some other foundation than the foundation of the Gospel, then it can only bring condemnation in the end. (cf. Rom. 2:14-16) Think of all Plato’s good works, and how at the same time that they were “good,” they were also the fruit of him actually shaking his fist in God’s face. So also, the good works of all the Gentiles are in **some sense** always the fruit of their rejection of Christ. (For example: Good works to earn salvation?) Indeed, we’re all, at the end of the day, philosophers.

So we see that there’s a big **difference** between the “good conduct” of a Plato and the apparently identical “good conduct” of a believer in Jesus Christ. Look at how Peter described *our* conduct as Christians in chapter one.

➤ 1 Peter 1:14–19 — *As obedient children*, not being conformed to the lusts of your former ignorance; but *as he who called you is holy*, **you also be HOLY in all your conduct [anastrophe]**, since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.” *And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one’s work*, **conduct [anastrepho] yourselves with FEAR** throughout the time of your sojourning, *knowing that you were ransomed* from the futile conduct of your ancestral family heritage, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with precious blood, like that of a lamb without blemish and without spot, [the blood of] Christ.

Did you see how in these verses all of our conduct is completely rooted and saturated in the doctrines and teachings of the Gospel? And so it’s **only this** conduct—rooted in the Gospel—that could ever be called “holy” – as Peter calls it in verse 15. And it’s **only this** conduct—saturated in the Gospel—that could ever be described as the “fear” of the Lord – as Peter says in verse 17.

There’s a big difference between conduct that’s simply “good” and conduct that’s *also* “holy.” So why does Peter change “holy” conduct in chapter one to “good” conduct here? He’s not lowering the standard. We’re to keep our conduct “good” **among the “Gentiles”** — which reminds us right away that we’re no longer the Gentiles we once were! (cf. 1 Pet. 4:1-5) It reminds us that we’re now a chosen race, and a royal priesthood, and a **holy** nation called out to live **holy** lives. When Peter says to keep our conduct among the Gentiles “good,” he’s not lowering the standard from “holy” to “good.” He’s just talking about our holy conduct now as something even pagan Gentiles can approve of and agree to be “good.” He’s thinking of our conduct now as something we actually share in common with all the “best” parts of the pagan world. In other words, even though we’re sojourners and foreigners, we do still have this in common with the world around us. And so it’s this fact that gives us the key to how we’re to approach all our living in this world.

“...keeping your conduct among the Gentiles good, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and give glory to God on the day of visitation.” If we’re keeping our conduct among the Gentiles good—if we’re living the very lives that the Gentiles praise and that many of them strive to live themselves—then why in the world are they still speaking against us as evildoers? Answer: Because our **good conduct** is also **holy conduct** –

⁶ By “good,” Peter means something different than what Paul has in mind in Romans 3:12. There, the word for “good” is *chrestotes* and Paul is thinking of that which has meritorious or saving value in the sight of God.

rooted and saturated in the teachings of the Gospel – and the good conduct of the world is not. The world **would always praise us** for our good works **if it weren't for the fact** that they too often fail to live by their own ideals, **and also** if it weren't for the fact that they would then have to praise us **as those who bear the name of Christ**.⁷ Are you seeing this crazy, frustrating tension? But if this is all true, then why does Peter emphasize the need to keep our conduct “good” among the very people who insist on speaking against us as evildoers?

“So that **when** [the Gentiles] speak against you as evildoers they may **see** your good deeds **and give glory to God on the day of visitation**.” So now we've skipped all the way ahead from our good deeds **now** and the Gentiles speaking against us as evildoers **now** to the final day of judgment when all the world—both the Christians **and** these Gentiles—will stand before God. And why does Peter do this? Because it's on that final day of judgment that the lives we've lived before the world, and the good deeds we've practiced in obedience to the Gospel of Jesus Christ will actually compel even the Gentiles who reject God to acknowledge His righteousness and His justice and give glory to Him.⁸ There are some who will be **saved** as a result of witnessing our “good” and “self-controlled” lives rooted in the Gospel. Peter writes in chapter three:

- 1 Peter 3:1–2 — Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, **they may be won** without a word by the **conduct** [*anastrophe*] of their wives, when they **see** your respectful and pure **conduct** [*anastrophe*].⁹

But I don't think this is Peter's point here. Only three verses later, when Peter gives an example of the kind of good and self-controlled lives we're to live before the Gentiles, he says:

- 1 Peter 2:15 — For this is the will of God, that **by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people**.

In chapter three, Peter writes:

- 1 Peter 3:15–16 (cf. Titus 2:7–8) — Always [be] prepared to make a defense to anyone who demands from you a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, **so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame**.

This makes me think of another passage in Isaiah:

- Isaiah 45:23–24¹⁰ — By myself I have sworn; from my mouth has gone out in righteousness a word that shall not return: “To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear

⁷ Peter assumes that his readers are being maligned and slandered **as Christians**.

⁸ Cf. Revelation 11:13; 14:7; 15:4; 1 Sam. 6:5; Achtemeier; Davids; Clowney; contra most other commentators

⁹ There's no hint in this passage that the husband is speaking against his wife as an evildoer. In chapter two, on the other hand, it appears that the Gentiles *remain* Gentiles – those who (always) speak against believers as evildoers (at least until the final day of visitation.)

¹⁰ Cf. Philippians 2:9–11 (Rom. 14:10–12) — Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess [acknowledge] that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

allegiance.” Only in the LORD, it shall be said of me, are righteousness and strength; **to him shall come and be ashamed all who were incensed against him.**

So the point here isn't that Peter had no concern for the salvation of the lost! It just seems to me that that's *beside* the point. Peter's thinking of those who are enemies of the Gospel, but who still agree that the self-controlled and virtuous lives that we live as the fruit of that Gospel are praiseworthy and good. If our self-controlled lives can have the effect of **putting to silence the ignorance of foolish people** even today, and if our good deeds can have the effect of **putting to shame those who slander our good behavior in Christ**, how much more will the lives that we live before the world compel these same people who speak against us now as evildoers to acknowledge¹¹ on the final day of judgment God's perfect justice and righteousness?

Conclusion

We are to conduct ourselves *before* the world always with the *goal* of that same world being compelled one day to give glory to God **because of the lives that we lived**. Now that's a truly astonishing thing! What an *awesome motivation* for us to diligently abstain from all the cravings of the flesh, which wage war against our souls, keeping our conduct among the Gentiles “*good*”—**EVEN WHEN** they speak against us as evildoers!!!

Sometimes I think we can be more careless about the lives we live before the world, as though somehow it matters less than the lives we live before each other. But we know that's not at all the case. Paul wrote to Titus:

- Titus 2:9–10 — Bondservants are to be submissive to their own masters in everything; they are to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, not pilfering, but showing all good faith, so that in everything they may **adorn the doctrine of God our Savior**.

Did you see that? There may have been bondservants in Paul's day who adorned the doctrines of Plato by their self-controlled and virtuous lives. But as the doctrines of Plato are ultimately a lie, the good conduct that adorned them had no lasting value. *Only* those self-controlled and virtuous lives that adorn the true doctrine of God our Savior will actually compel all the world, in the end, to give glory to God. And so our daily conduct has a significance and a meaning in this world that no other lives—no matter how self-controlled or how virtuous they are—can ever have. Are we daily adorning with our good works the Gospel of Jesus Christ? Will our lives and our conduct, rooted in the teachings of the Gospel, be a cause one day for the whole world to give glory to God? It should be our goal to do all that we do as it were in public before the eyes of the whole world, so that even when they still speak against us as evildoers, they'll be compelled one day to acknowledge the truly “good” life that all of God's children have lived. (cf. Clowney)

In the coming weeks Peter's going to give some very specific examples of the kind of “good” lives we're to be living in this world, but for now let's conclude by remembering the words of Jesus which Peter certainly had in his mind when he was writing this letter:

¹¹ To “give glory to God” sometimes has the meaning of simply confessing or acknowledging something to be true. (cf. Josh. 7:19; John 9:24; Phil. 2:9-11)

- Matthew 5:16¹² — Let your light shine before others, *so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.*

¹² 1 Timothy 3:7 — [The overseer] must be well thought of by outsiders [though he may at the same time be spoken against by outsiders as an evildoer]...

2 Corinthians 8:21 — We aim at what is good not only in the Lord's sight but also in the sight of man.

1 Thessalonians 4:11–12 — We urge you, brothers... to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.

1 Corinthians 10:32 — Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God.

Colossians 4:5 — Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time.