

THE CHALLENGE TO EXCELLENCE

1 Peter 2:11-12

Intro: I have a good preacher friend named Jerry King. We worked together in Lawrenceburg at different congregations several years ago. I remember Jerry would have a prayer request that he would put in every public prayer. It would something like this: “Lord, help us to remember that we are a “chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation and a peculiar people” and may we act like it!”

That is what Peter is saying to us in the verses we are considering today. Every day we need to remember who we are and that we have been called out darkness into God’s marvelous light to proclaim His excellencies to all men.

Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul.

Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may on account of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation. (1 Peter 2:11-12)

What a challenge for every Christian-to live worthy of the high calling with which God has called us. In two powerful verses Peter summarizes the challenge of our lives as Christians!

ABSTAIN FROM FLESHLY LUSTS!

A battle goes on for our souls.

The Christian is a “walking civil war”. Two forces vie for our will, the flesh and the Holy Spirit of God. Fleshly desires often grow out of the needs of the body, but they may also involve sins of disposition. Paul using the same idea of inner conflict enumerates the works of the flesh.

Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. (Galatians 5:19-21)

These "wage war" (the word for a military campaign), the seat of spiritual life and moral living.

Christians need to abstain (hold oneself off) from the works of the flesh.

We often hear the word in a context of voting (“For”, “Against”, “Abstain”). Or maybe we hear the word used in referring to a young person’s attitude toward fornication. When a young person practices “abstinence” he/she is holding himself/herself off from one work of the flesh (fornication).

Peter is urging us to consider all areas of our life where the works of the flesh might gain a foothold.

How?

Pinpoint the problem areas in your life and pray about it. Eliminate the situations that make this a temptation for you. Find out what positive virtue the flesh is substituting for and work to replace every fleshly trait with its proper one!

Why?

Because we are citizens of another country!

There is an expression, “When in Rome, do as the Romans do!” There is a spiritual equivalent. When on earth, do like the rest of the people on earth! But Peter reminds us that:

We are aliens (outsiders)

We are strangers (foreigners).

Peter has already used both terms of disciples of Jesus (1:1; 17)

Because we are citizens of another country we live by the laws of that country, not by the canons of the world about us!

KEEP YOUR BEHAVIOR EXCELLENT

It is not enough to try to avoid sinning, must practice positive righteousness!

That’s something like a football team practicing all season on “defense”!

We have a garden all tilled up for plants. Never got around to putting out the plants. Guess what’s growing there!?

So it is with our lives. If we clear the ground, we have to put good seed in! In fact, the more we pursue the right way of living, the easier it will be to overcome the wrong way! Busy yourself doing right.

Whatever is right we need to do it better than our friends and neighbors.

Excellent (of quality, in accordance w. the purpose of something or someone: *good, useful, morally good, noble, praiseworthy, contributing to salvation*)

The idea would be then that we represent the best in quality of what Christians are supposed to be! We need to be seen as living a superlative lifestyle!

How?

“Success means being the best. Excellence means being your best.

Success, to many, means being better than everyone else.

Excellence means being better tomorrow than you were yesterday.

Success means exceeding the achievements of other people.

Excellence means matching your practice with your potential.”¹

Why?

Our good deeds will prove the world wrong!

We may be slandered for being Christians. We may receive undeserved criticism. We may be accused of things of which we are not guilty. The word is "spoken against".

Our good deeds will lead others to the Lord.

Our neighbors and friends are watching us!

They observe our lives!

"To view carefully as a personal witness" (Wuest)

But they may glorify God in the day of visitation.

"Visitation" translates "episcopos"--the word for overseer. When we visit someone we say "I am going to see them!" So God "visits" the sinner in salvation; he comes to him in grace and mercy.

and will level you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation." (Luke 19:44)

Perhaps no verse in the NT more clearly portrays the power of a godly example!

Conclusion: Let Peter's challenge burn in your heart daily. Dare to be different. Rise above mediocrity. Make a difference in the lives of the people around you. Be salt! Be light!