

# An Exhortation to Walk Honestly

*Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation (I Peter 2:11, 12).*

Peter addresses the church here as “dearly beloved” who are “pilgrims and strangers.” In the opening verses of this epistle Peter mentions those who have been elected to be strangers. “Stranger” could probably be translated as “boarder,” one who lives in a home, perhaps with a family, but does not belong to the family. He has no right in the house; he simply lives in the house. This is the position of true believers in the world: they are in it, but do not belong to it.

“Pilgrim” means almost the same thing. He is one who travels in a foreign country, a country to which he does not belong. He is a citizen of another country, that is, a heavenly country. As long, therefore, as he is in this world, he does not build his foundations deep, but he pitches his tent as he moves from day to day. These strangers and pilgrims are a people who have no country here below, but their homeland is in heaven, where presently they expect to go. These the apostle exhorts to walk honestly. In the midst of the world they are constantly to have a walk or conversation that is praiseworthy.

Our walk as to its outward manifestation is one’s conduct with relation to other people and the things about him. This is implied in the word “conversation,” which receives the emphasis in the text. Yet it can easily be understood that one’s outward display has more to it than mere form, for life and its manifestation is more than what can be seen of it. What is outward is motivated by inward principles. One’s walk includes his thoughts, desires, and intents of the heart that always regulate the members of the body with respect to what is without. That the inward, moral character of a man belongs to his walk of life becomes very evident as soon as you observe the walk of a man either in sin or in its antithesis, grace.

Scripture speaks of the walk of both the ungodly and the godly. The walk of the ungodly is motivated by the inner principle of a depraved and wicked heart. He is inwardly corrupt and ungodly at heart. All his thoughts are to do evil; his will is perverse; his root is unholy. Thus, his outward conduct and manifestation of life is revealed in every kind of abominable work. When he speaks, he lies and curses. When he sings, he rejoices in darkness. The difference between him and the child of God is that he does not have grace. He does not possess the grace of faith, and whatsoever is not of faith is sin. This does not mean that the ungodly man always cheats and tells

lies when you deal with him. That he does not do so is not due to a certain common grace that is given to check him in his sin and enable him to do good works. He has no grace whatsoever. There may be many reasons why he does not cheat, but grace is not one of them.

The apostle, however, is not speaking of the walk of the ungodly, but of the child of God. He also has a walk that involves his whole conduct in the midst of the world, where he is called to be a light. His outward walk and manifestation of life should be—and in principle is—motivated by the inward principle of grace.

First, he does this, negatively, by abstaining from fleshly lusts that war against the soul. Lusts have their seat in the flesh, that is, man's nature which is corrupt. The flesh is not only visible material of which our bodies are composed, but includes all of our nature through which we are connected to and have contact with the world of sense. Lusts of the flesh are the desires that come up out of that corrupt flesh, that seek to satisfy the flesh. They are as evil as the flesh from which they arise. They are found not only in the ungodly, but also in the flesh of the Christian. As long as the Christian is in the world, he has to contend with his flesh, his old nature. Because he still has an old nature, he also has in a lesser or greater degree the lusts of the flesh that seek to satisfy the worldly aspect of his nature.

From these lusts we are to abstain. That means that in no sense may we indulge in or make provision for these fleshly lusts. We must fight against them, as suggested by the phrase, "which war against the soul." The soul and its fight refer to the soul of the Christian who has been regenerated. The soul is the intellect and will, and all that pertains to them from the point of view of the dominion that the regenerated principle must have and does have over the soul. These fleshly lusts fight against that soul that is under the dominion of the regenerated principle. From these we must abstain. The Christian has within him a new principle of life. Therefore, he is a stranger and a pilgrim in the world. Fleshly lusts do not belong to the world from which he is reborn, and thus he must fight. In the measure that he fights, in that measure he overcomes and is sanctified; and in the measure that he does not fight, in that measure he is overcome, and walks in darkness.

Second, from a positive viewpoint, one must walk honestly. Literally this means "good in appearance, beautiful." One is honest in his walk when in every aspect he manifests himself to be what essentially he is, a Christian. When a Christian seeks to fulfill the lusts of the flesh, he is dishonest. If his walk is good and beautiful, when he lives according to Christian principles, he is honest. Such a walk that is good and beautiful, and therefore honest, is possible for the Christian because he is renewed by the regenerating grace of the Holy Spirit. By grace he is impelled to fight against fleshly lusts and to walk a new and holy life.

This calling is difficult. One must contend with his own flesh. Though he is now a stranger, formerly he was not, living as the Gentiles, quite at home in the world. According to his nature he is a citizen, seeking the things of the flesh and of darkness, but now he has obtained mercy with a changed life and a heavenly citizenship. Though he has the beginning of a new obedience, he finds another law in his members.

The Gentile world speaks against the stranger and pilgrim and actually accuses him of being an evildoer. So it was in Peter's day. When there was an earthquake or pestilence, the Christians were blamed. When they refused to worship Caesar as God, they were treated as criminals. So it always is. The church is either laughed to scorn or persecuted. If she is faithful, what happened to Christ also becomes her experience. Thus the life of a Christian is very difficult.

Now there is a good purpose for this exhortation as delivered by Peter. It is the day of visitation. On the one hand, it is the day of God's judgment that he inflicts upon the ungodly in just retribution for their sin. This is not only meted out at the end of the world, but is being realized in this present time. The very fact that a drunkard experiences delirium tremens is due to the judgment of God. This is true also for the one who lives in vice and consequently suffers a broken home and venereal disease.

On the other hand, it is the day when God visits with his grace and calls the sinner out of darkness into his marvelous light, thus converting the sinner from his evil way. This is the sense that Peter is using in the text. The idea is that the Gentile may see your good works, and glorify God when he visits them also in his grace. This makes the words of our text most meaningful, not only with a view to the walk of the people of God, but also with a view to the children of this world among whom God also has his people, and who must yet be saved.

Jesus said in Matthew 5:16: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." Peter says almost the same thing here. Those good works are those that proceed out of true faith, that are done according to the law of God, and unto his glory. They are truly manifestations of an honest walk. The ungodly will not glorify God unless they are converted. But when God visits them in his grace and converts them, they will see the good walk of the Christian in an altogether different light. When once they falsely accused the children of God, and slandered those whom they observed were walking honestly, they will now glorify God for his grace, which they will behold in the good works of the Christian. Therefore, when we reveal ourselves as those who are partakers of the anointing of Christ, when we walk in all good works that God has before prepared that we should walk in them, God is pleased to use that godly walk to bring others to

conversion. What a privilege, what a calling! May God give to you, young people, and to all of us that grace to walk honestly to the end.