

Armagh Baptist Church Bible Studies
Wednesday 9th June 2010 – 8:00pm
1 Peter 2:11-12 – ‘Why the Need for Godly Living?’

Introduction

What happens when the Kingdom of God rubs shoulders with this hopeless world in which we live? That's where the rubber really hits the road! Our Christianity isn't worth much, if it can't be worked out in everyday life in the everyday world in which we live.

Peter has just told us in v.9 *'You are a Holy Nation!'*

But then he tells us in v.12 to *'Live...good lives among the pagans!'*

So we are a holy nation of believers called to live our lives among pagans!

That's quite a tall order! – But do you really believe that? Is this not a case of over-exaggeration? Do we really live among pagans? Or maybe on the other side of the coin, do we need to ask ourselves, are we really that holy?

Maybe that is part of the ineffectiveness of the church today.

The church has dropped its standards, so much so, that there really isn't that much difference between somebody from the church and somebody from the world!

Peter wants to make as clear a distinction as possible between the people in the church (in the Kingdom of God) and those who are still outside it – the people of the world.

But how are these differences and distinctions supposed to display themselves in our lives?

- Is it in the clothes we wear?

- Is it in the places we go to, or don't go to? Or what is it that sets us apart?

Well, it's not necessarily these outward differences at all!

Our distinctiveness as Christians should be seen most of all in the kind of relationships we have with other people! In the quality of our relationships.

What do I mean? Relationships?

Well Peter is just about to start into a whole section all about relationships. How we get on with various different people. The point he is making is that it's in these relationships that we are supposed to show to the watching world what it really means to be a Christian.

Life is all about relationships. We can't live without relationships!

'No man is an island, entire in itself.' So said John Donne (1572 – 1631)

'No man is an island entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main.'

Verse 17 is the key verse or summary verse in this passage:

- *'Show proper respect to everyone'* – i.e. especially outside the church.
- *'love the brotherhood of believers'* – i.e. those inside the church.
- *'Fear God'* – i.e. How is your relationship with God right now?
- *'Honour the King'* – What about our relationship with the State authorities?

Now look at how this section fills that summary out:

(2:13-17) – How the Christian should relate to the State,

(2:18-25) – How the Christian should relate to his/her boss,

(3:1-7) – How a Christian should relate to their husband or wife,

(3:8-12) – How we relate to each other as church members.

So life is all about relationships. How are we as Christians going to behave in these relationships any differently from how the world and his wife around us behave in these relationships? That's where the real difference needs to show in our lives. That's where we need to be witnessing to the world around us, as we make a difference in these areas simply because we belong to God. That's what witnessing is about!

So it will be a case of being *in* the world, rubbing shoulders *with* the world, but not behaving *like* the world. Otherwise how will they see any difference in us, if they never get close enough to find out?

There's a key word in this section that we need to take notice of:

'submit' / 'be submissive' (2:13,18; 3:1)

And look at 3:7. The word submit is not there, but there are helpful phrases in its place. 'Be considerate' / 'treat them with respect'.

The idea is not to rebel against our God-given role, but to submit ourselves to that role, because it is God's role or God's will for us as Christians to live that way!

After all, if we claim to believe in Jesus as our Lord (3:15), then all of life now is to do with submitting to His will for us.

Peter is about to teach us what God's will is for us in each of these relationships. The question is: will we be prepared to submit ourselves to those roles, and to God's will for us in these areas?

Over our next few studies in 1 Peter we will be looking at God's Will for us in each of these relationships, but this evening I want us to take time to look at vs.11 and 12 in particular...

Q. Why should we submit to God in these relationships?

Answer: (1) For the sake of the Lost (vs.11-12)
(2) For the sake of the Lord (vs.13-17)

Let's take those in reverse order:

(1) For the Sake of the Lord (vs.13-17)

Just look at those verses and see how many times God is mentioned as the reason for us having a right attitude to the authorities of the State in which we live:

(v.13) – '*For the Lord's sake...*'

(v.15) – '*For it is God's will...*'

(v.16) – '*Live as servants of God...*'

(v.17) – '*...Fear God, honour the king.*'

In other words, it is actually because of our relationship with God as born again Christians that we should have a good relationship with the authorities or governing bodies of the State in which we live!

There are no grounds here for Christians pursuing a policy of civil disobedience, is there? (But more about that next time...)

(2) For the Sake of the Lost (vs.11-12)

For the sake of lost men and women, we as Christians should submit to the roles God has assigned to us in life, in order that we might be a better witness to them of the benefits of becoming a Christian themselves.

(v.11) Peter says,

'*Dear Friends...*' and yes, we are now friends of God, whereas the lost are still enemies of God. But the word here is '*agapetos*' = 'beloved / dearly beloved.' We have a special relationship to God that the lost don't have.

(i) God's Dearly Beloved Children (v.11a)

We are loved by God. We are the Children of God. We belong to the family of God. God has set His love upon us. '*We are accepted in the Beloved.*' The Lost are also loved by God, even though they don't know it or realise it (John 3:16) '*For God so loved the world...*'

At the moment they are still under His condemnation but they could come in out of the cold and darkness into the warmth and light of His love, just as we have (2:9). But in a special sense we are the '*dearly loved children of God.*' And because God has first loved us we also love Him in return.

Well then, remember what Jesus said in John 14:-

(v.15) – '*If you love me, you will obey what I command.*'

Not just out of a sense of duty, but out of a sense of deep devotion.

So we don't grudgingly submit to our God-given roles in life, we submit because we want to, out of love, as a grateful response to what God has done for us in Christ.

(v.23) – *'If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching.'*

And here God says we are to live like...

(ii) Aliens and strangers in this world! (v.11b)

We are to live here in the world, but this is not our country of origin. This is not where we belong. We belong to another Kingdom, and our citizenship is there – it's in heaven. (See Philippians 3:20 and Hebrews 11:8-16).

Recently we had Andy & Nancy Spohrer staying overnight with us in our new home in Markethill. They were over for the opening of the new building for Carrickmacross Baptist Church in Co Monaghan. They planted Carrickmacross Baptist Fellowship around the same time as we planted Cavan Baptist Church. So we had lots of fellowship together back then. The Spohrers are from Maine, USA; they were missionaries here in Ireland. So when they lived in Carrickmacross, their citizenship was still in the USA. While they lived here, every year they had to go along to the Passport authorities here in Ireland and ask for a renewal of their visas, so that they could have permission to stay here for another year. To be given that right to stay here they had to prove that they had behaved themselves, and that they were living within the laws of this country. And actually they had to prove that they were serving a useful purpose being here in Ireland. They didn't belong here, and anybody who got to know them and talked to them soon realised that. They talked with a different accent; they lived differently from us in lots of little ways: They had different customs, attitudes, behaviour patterns from the locals. The locals could pick up on things about Andy & Nancy that they either liked or disliked, and all of those things reflected back on their perception of Andy & Nancy's home-country – America. The locals formed an idea of what America was like, and rightly or wrongly about what ALL Americans were like, just by looking at them!

But let's take that illustration into the spiritual realm for a moment:

As a Christian, your citizenship is in heaven. Your name is registered there. You are living here in Ireland as a resident alien. OK?

Well, just supposing you had to report back to God once a year to have your visa renewed, to allow you to stay here another year, and God asked you the following questions, how would you answer?

- Have you been keeping the laws of the land?
- Have you been behaving yourself as a Christian?
- Are you still serving a useful purpose in being here, in terms of your effectiveness in Christian service?

How would you answer the Lord?

Just as Andy & Nancy were Americans living in Ireland, so we are Christians living here in Ireland too:

- Do you talk differently from those you rub shoulders with?

(I don't mean in terms of your accent, but what about the sort of language you use, the jokes and stories you tell, the topics of conversation that take up your time? How different are you really from the world around you? Do people know that you belong to God and that you don't really belong here?)

- Do you really live that differently from the world around you, or do you just hold the same values about things as they do?

- And when people look at you and highlight things they like and dislike about your character and personality, how does that reflect back on heaven, and indeed on other Christians?

- If you were the only Christian they knew, what sort of an impression would they have about ALL Christians – a good one or a bad one?

Peter wants us to remember that we are supposed to be living as aliens and strangers in the world... *'This world is not your home, you're just a-passing through.'*

But you're also...

(iii) Soldiers in a spiritual battle (v.11c)

And this is what makes it difficult for us to live attractive Christian lives and maintain a consistent witness to the lost. Because we have an enemy within us, that is constantly trying to defeat us.

Peter *'urges us, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against our souls!'* (v.11). We are not at war with the people around us in the world, but our real battle is with the sinful passions and desires that are within us.

Our enemy is within! Satan is trying to defeat us subtly from the inside.

The word Peter uses is 'war' – *'they **war** against our souls!'*

The word means 'a military campaign'. It's not just a few skirmishes or a few battles – it's a whole series of battles that we go on having to fight and win. It's a constant warfare, and we need to be always on guard!

It's whenever we drop our guards that the devil gets a foothold and brings us down. We give into temptation, and we sin, and the problem is that when we do we discredit our King, we let the side down. In the eyes of the lost we are seen as no different from them, so what's so attractive or so important about becoming a Christian? So for the sake of the lost we need to keep alert to the devil's attacks and temptations and not try to face him on our own, but in the strength which Christ alone can give us. With His ability we can overcome and be more than conquerors! (See 1 Peter 5:8-10).

We are God's dearly loved Children.
We are Aliens and Strangers in the World.
We are Soldiers in a Spiritual Battle.
But ultimately we are...

(iv) Witnesses to the Lost around us. (v.12)

It's for their sakes we need to work at our relationships with others. And in those relationships to show what it really means to be a Christian – and the difference Christ can make in a life. This is a crazy mixed up world and they need good role models from us as Christians. So Peter says in v.12:

'Live such good lives among the pagans... that they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.'

Pagans / Gentiles = 'the nations' i.e. 'the world' 'the lost'!

Their lives are marked by sin and falsehood (1 Cor 5:1; 12:2).

But whether we like it or not unsaved people are looking at us, and judging Christianity from us (See 1 Peter 3:15-16).

- Maybe sometimes they see a strength in us, that they would like.
- Maybe they distort the truth about us and spread bad reports (3:16)
- Maybe some of them are looking for excuses from our lives to give them reason to reject the Gospel. Just to be able to say, *'well if that's Christianity, then I want nothing to do with it!'*

Whatever their attitude towards us, it is our responsibility to...

(1) Live Good Lives (v.12a)

The word for good means 'honest' or 'attractive'. Are you marked by honesty? Is there something attractive about your life?

Jesus said one day in Peter's hearing (Matt 5:16) *'Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father who is in heaven.'* So we are called to live good lives among the pagans...

(2) By Doing Good Deeds (v.12b)

Let's not be afraid of 'good works'. They can't save us, but our good deeds might just encourage some lost person to get saved!

They might oppose us now, but if we go on showing them reality then maybe one day they too will trust Christ and on that day they might thank us for our witness, and they will certainly be glorifying to God.

Conclusion

So as we look at these different relationships, let's remember we need to submit to these roles – for the sake of the Lost, and for the Lord's sake!

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