

TITLE: "Proclaiming the Excellencies of God" (Part 2)

PASSAGE: 1 Peter 2:12

THEME: Proclaiming the excellencies of God in our lives and witness

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Read Passage

In his book "Therefore, Stand" which was written at t/end of WW2, t/author, Wilbur Smith, observes that t/World w/few exceptions has always opposed JC & his followers.

"At first one would think that a religion which exalts and seeks to follow the only perfect and righteous man who has ever lived on this earth, who never harmed anyone, whose words delivered from superstition and fear, whose works redeemed from pain, and demons, and death, and hunger, whose life was as a great shaft of light shot into the murky darkness of the Roman world, in that sensual and skeptic century, who died because He loved us, and who always sought to bring men into communion with God, to bestow upon them eternal life and a home in heaven, one would have thought that such a character, and the religion which His life and work on earth established, would have been welcomed with open arms the first moment it was announced, and would by its very message, the good works which flowed from it, and the hope which it established, never know opposition, or attack, or denunciation, except from the demons of hell, and Satan, who is a liar and murder from the beginning. But such has not been its history. In fact, the New Testament, itself, from the records of the birth of our Lord down to the end of St. John's vision of the era of anarchy and persecution to come, testifies in the most startling way to the fact that Christ Himself was most viciously and constantly attacked, that His apostles suffered the same opposition, and that it was predicted by these very apostles that Christianity would continue so to suffer, down to the end of this age." [cited in MacArthur, 136]

There have been times when those verbal attacks and criticisms have been warranted, such as when Xns or Xn leaders have scandalized t/CH. No doubt you can remember t/televangelist scandals of t/late 1980s.

So we are exhorted, as in this passage, to lead lives that are above reproach, lives of X-likeness, so that those who despise t/message of X have no dirt to spread on t/face of t/cross.

Commentator Robert Leighton==>

"When a Christian walks [with integrity], his enemies have no where to fasten their teeth on him, but are forced to gnaw their own malignant tongues. . . . And this is a wise Christian's way, instead of impatiently fretting at the mistakes or willful [slanders] of men, to keep still on his calm temper of mind, and upright course of life, and silent innocence; this, as a rock breaks the waves into foam that about it." [Leighton, 195]

There's no guarantee that an upright life will prevent criticism & ridicule.

I learned this early on in my Xn life. When I was about 20 I worked in a factory as a QC inspector. I was an out of the closet Xn. (I proudly declared my allegiance to JC.) And I remember taking quite a bit of ridicule.

As t/saying goes, sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me. Not entirely true. Names hurt. Sticks and stones hurt more, and we have a sea of martyrs today who pay t/ultimate price for their faith. In fact, each yr. an est. 100,000 Xns face not only ridicule, but death. In t/time it takes to listen to this sermon, 10 or more Xns will have given their lives for t/faith. Indeed, t/CH is watered w/the blood of t/martyrs.

In this country, that's not something we face. For t/most part, it wasn't something Peter's readers faced (though they would before long).

For Peter's audience as well as for us, the question isn't "how can we stand t/test of martyrdom." ? is "How can we stand in t/midst of a hostile world that disdains all we stand for?"

This passage, as well as that which follows in the rest of chapter 2, chapter 3, and chapter 4 answers that question.

We are to proclaim God's excellencies by protecting our passions while living with a pure purpose before the persecutions and problems of a pagan planet.

The passage is short and to the point ==>

11 Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers, to abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul. 12 Keep your behavior excellent among the pagans, so that in whatever they accuse you as evildoers, they may see your good works and glorify God in the day of visitation.

This passage is all about ==>

I. Proclaiming the Excellencies of God (vv. 11-12) (theme that goes back to v. 9)

A. Proclaiming God's Excellencies By Our Inward Devotion - *Our Preparation* (11)

1. Rejoice that you are loved

Have joy; be excited that God loves you with an enduring, eternal love.

2. Recognize that you are a pilgrim

Word "Pilgrim" is derived from another word that lit. means, "To settle down alongside of pagans." Recognize you are not of this world; you're a pilgrim, an alien just passing thru.

3. Resist sinful temptations

... abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul.

B. Proclaiming God's Excellencies By Our Outward Duty (Our Proclamation) - 12

1. How can I maintain my witness in a hostile society?

a. Is there any doubt that we are living in an increasingly hostile society as far as Christianity is concerned?

I'm talking about real Xnty. No one in t/world worried about "Lib. Xnty" which is a contra. in terms. In fact, t/entire lib. Xn movt. is dying a slow agonizing death.

I'm talking about real believers in JC; those who have been born again by God's grace and who live live/worldviews consistent w/that transformation.

I've said many times that t/movers and shakers among t/secularists in our nation realize that we are their number one obstacle that stands in t/way of their objectives (have a society free from t/confines of Xn morality; a society replete w/legalized drugs, prostitution, abortion, & homosexual marriage). Those w/i t/secular political arena know that only t/CH stands in t/way. Why their agenda is to remove t/influence of t/CH from t/state.

"You do your CH things in CH & believe what you want in t/CH. But don't try to bring those things into t/schools, government, or t/media."

Once that objective is met (well on it's way) then they will censure t/CH's & if a CH proclaims anything deemed intolerant, they will fine you, shut you down, and/or arrest those responsible. (home schooling declared illegal since govt. education is becoming t/means of inculturating young people.)

Just last week a story broke on WorldNetDaily about FL police harassing a group of people trying to collect signatures on a defense of marriage petition.

The group, Florida for Marriage, had rented a display table at a June Promise Keepers conference in the Fort Lauderdale area. As the signatures were being collected, some police officers working security at t/event ordered them to stop

accepting names. When t/volunteers claimed that this was w/i their constitutional rights, t/police officers physically removed the display from 'public view'. Threatened at least one of t/volunteers w/arrest.

It gets worse: "Two of the male officers mocked the pro-marriage group by kissing each other." Fort. a volunteer had a camera & caught that on film.

This follows t/arrest of Xns in Chicago where they were allegedly verbally abused & mocked by Chicago police & similar incident in Phil. a few years ago.

The public rights of Xns (freedom of religion & free speech) are being dissolved in a pool of post-modern tolerance. It's happening in schools, in politics, & in t/workplace where Xns are being fired for expressing their views. Looks like it's only going to get worse..

B. Proclaiming God's Excellencies By Our Outward Duty (Our Proclamation) - 12

1. How can I maintain my witness in a hostile society?

5 ideas that come out of this verse.

a. #1 - Stand Sentry: Guard your Behavior

Each of us has a responsibility before God to keep watch over our conduct, guarding it as a soldier would guard his post.

Keep your behavior excellent . . . (Peter says)

(1) Brings us back to Verse 11

A. Proclaiming God's Excellencies By Our Inward Devotion (Our Preparation)

"Devotion" comes before our "Duty"; our "Preparation" must precede our "Proclamation"

Last week I gave you 6 ways to maintain your devotion to X in form of an acrostic "RESIST" (Reboot your spiritual disciplines; Exercise your

Spiritual Resources; Stay in the Race; Involve yourself in the church; See sin from God's perspective; Take advantage of godly council and mutual accountability.

It all starts in t/heart. What you do is indicative of what's in your heart.

a. #1 - Stand Sentry: Guard your Behavior

That starts w/the truths that flow out of v. 11 (Rejoice that you are loved; Remember you are a pilgrim; Resist sinful temptations). Wherever you are, people are watching you. We have to be on our guard.

I once undertook several hours of training in the defensive use of firearms. When you may legally use a gun to stop someone committing a crime. Shoot and don't shoot scenarios. One of principles that was emphasized over and over again was readiness. Beware of your surroundings. As a way to assess your surroundings & t/appropriate readiness you should have, they used a three color system: RED, YELLOW, GREEN.

GREEN = Relaxed. You can let down your guard. An example would be when you're at home where there's no immanent threat to your safety.

YELLOW = Potential danger. Maybe I'm out at night walking in a parking lot alone & a gang of young men are right in front of me. I'm aware/alert that there's a potential threat there.

RED = I'm under attack. Potential danger has become a reality & now I'm in t/process of defending myself.

Maybe, we should have something similar in our Xn lives.

GREEN = times when we can relax. We're taking a nap; we're reading a book; we're praying or meditating on t/things of God.

YELLOW = means we're on our toes. We're ready, not to defend ourselves, but to give a defense for t/hope within us. I'm guarding my

behavior, I'm ready to share t/gospel with that person.

RED = means there's an urgent need. I'm feeling grouchy at work & if that co-worker says one more thing I'm going to snap at him. NO! This is red-alert time. I'm guarding my heart that I not sin w/my mouth.

Men - you're walking through t/mall & there's that clothing store w/the 10 x 6 full-color posters of near-naked women hanging right in t/window. Red Alert Zone! Time to Put t/Blinders on!

What I'm trying to say is that we need to keep up our guard. We need to be aware of positive opportunities as well as negative threats. We need to stand sentry over our lives.

We need to be George Patton, not Beatle Baily. We need to be Douglas MacArthur, not Gomer Pyle.

B. Proclaiming God's Excellencies By Our Outward Duty (Our Proclamation) - 12

1. How can I maintain my witness in a hostile society?

a. #1 - Stand Sentry: Guard your Behavior

Might note Peter's warning at t/end of this letter (5:8-9). In this sense, there's really no area of our lives that we can be complacent in. We face war on 3 fronts: world around us, flesh w/i us, t/forces of evil o/s of us.

When we let down our guard we're like Samson in t/arms of Delilah. T/locks of our strength are cut off we cease to maintain t/spiritual separation from t/world & t/flesh of which the Nazarite vow was a type.

b. #2 Stay Separate: Transform Culture Don't let Culture Transform You Brings us back to v. 12 . . .

(1) The sphere of our behavior

Keep your behavior excellent [where?] among the pagans . . .

(a) I like that translation of t/noun ἐθνους ("ethnic")

Most translations render it "Gentiles" but in this context it's referring to t/rank & file of mankind; those who are outside of t/CH..

As one Greek scholar writes ==>

". . . not to Gentiles as in contrast to the Jews, but to the unsaved world, the world of people without Christ." [Wuest]

(2) This is where we live

We are pilgrims passing through a foreign world on our way to t/celestial city of God. We are "aliens and strangers" (v. 11).

That doesn't mean we withdraw from culture. We're not to est. some sort of Xn commune. Issue is never that we are to withdraw from t/world. Issue is maintaining a distinction while being in t/world. Do others see JC in you? // that you are different?

Early CH Father, Tertullian: "Christians are distinguished from the rest of men neither by country nor by language nor by customs. For nowhere do they dwell in cities of their own; they do not use any strange forms of speech or practice a singular mode of life . . . While [Christians] dwell in both Greek and barbarian cities, each as his lot was cast, and follow the customs of the land in dress and food and other matters of living, they show forth the remarkable and admittedly strange order of their own citizenship. They live in fatherlands of their own, but as aliens. They share all things as citizens, and suffer all things as strangers. . . . They are in the flesh, but they do not live after the flesh." [Letter to Diognetus, 42]

We're to infiltrate our culture w/o allowing t/culture to infiltrate us!

(3) Every one of us is in full-time Christian ministry

This is 1 of t/central truths rediscovered by t/Reformers. There's no clergy/laity distinction when it comes to ministry. You're a minister of JC wherever God has placed you.

2 Corinthians 2:14-15 14 [God] . . . manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place. 15 For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing;

Wherever you are t/o t/week (home, work, school) you are a fragrance of X to a lost & dying world.

b. #2 Stay Separate: Transform Culture Don't' let Culture Transform You

(1) The sphere of our behavior

We are pilgrims among pagans.

(2) The nature of our behavior Is that it is to be good.

Keep your behavior excellent . . .

(a) Adjective καλος refers to that which is good in the sense of excellent or noble or beautiful

That's to describe our behavior. As we live our lives out in t/world our behavior is to be {cite}. It's to resonate w/the excellence, nobility & beauty of X.

1. How can I maintain my witness in a hostile society?

a. #1 - Stand Sentry: Guard your Behavior

b. #2 Stay Separate: Transform Culture Don't' let Culture Transform You

c. #3 Suppose Slander: Assume Accusations Against Anything Absolute

What does that mean?

It means that people are going to react neg. against you when you stand for t/truth. The truth is absolute, it's not relative. IOW - we believe in unchangeable truth because we believe in an unchangeable God.

When you take a stand on absolute truth you will be criticized for it.

(1) The Bible is a narrow-minded book!

In it we're told that marriage is to be between one man and one woman // that it's to be for life // that our culturally accepted practices of abortion and homosexuality are anathema to God // eternal life comes only through faith in JC.

Listen folks, we're not out to win any popularity contests!

. . . the message of the cross is foolishness to [the world] but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. (1 Corinthians 1:18)

Our creed is Christ; the world's creed is quite different from that.

I recently read a poem taken from t/book "Can Man Live Without God" It is loaded with sarcasm, and it reflects t/philosophy of life so commonly embraced by our culture.

Our Creed

We believe in Marx Freud and Darwin.
We believe everything is OK
as long as you don't hurt anyone,
to the best of your definition of hurt,
and to the best of your knowledge.

We believe in sex before, during, and after marriage.
We believe in the therapy of sin.
We believe that adultery is fun.

We believe that sodomy's OK.
We believe that taboos are taboo.

We believe that everything's getting better
despite evidence to the contrary.
The evidence must be investigated
And you can prove anything with evidence.

We believe in there's something in horoscopes, UFO's and bent spoons;
Jesus was a good man just like Buddha, and ourselves.
He was a good moral teacher although we think His good morals were bad.

We believe that all religions are basically the same . . .
They all believe in love and goodness.
They only differ on matters of creation,
sin, heaven, hell, God, and salvation.

We believe that after death comes Nothing
Because when you ask the dead what happens they say nothing.
If death is not the end, if the dead have lied, then it's
compulsory heaven for all
excepting perhaps Hitler, Stalin, and Genghis Khan.

We believe in Masters and Johnson.
What's selected is average.
What's average is normal.
What's normal is good.

We believe in total disarmament.
We believe there are direct links between warfare and bloodshed.
Americans should beat their guns into tractors
and the Russians (or terrorists) would be sure to follow.

We believe that man is essentially good.
It's only his behavior that lets him down.
This is the fault of society.
Society is the fault of conditions.
Conditions are the fault of society.

We believe that each man must find the truth that is right for him.

Reality will adapt accordingly.
The universe will readjust.
History will alter.
We believe that there is no absolute truth
excepting the truth
that there is no absolute truth.

We believe in the rejection of creeds,
and the flowering of individual thought.
(Written by Steven Turner, quoted in the book "Can Man Live without God")

I have just read you an excerpt from t/syllabus from most any class in most any American University.

Is it any surprise that when you take your stand on absolute truth you will be labeled as narrow-minded?! And those who accuse you of such may even claim that you're t/one who is evil (you're intolerant // bigot // homophobic // narrow-minded). So t/light is called darkness and the darkness light.

c. Suppose Slander: (Peter does)

Keep your behavior excellent among the pagans [why?] so that in whatever they accuse *you* as evildoers . . .

(1) You see, we are the ones who are called evil

That was t/same accusation leveled against Jesus by those who rejected Him in John 18:30 where this same word, (κακοποιος - to do evil) is used.

In Acts chapt. 28:22 Luke records that Xnty was considered by t/world "a sect that was everywhere spoken against."

(2) In the early Roman Empire, Xnty was deemed criminal

(a) An even larger issue is that initially, the Romans & the Greeks didn't differentiate between Christians and Jews

Xnty was considered another Jewish "sect" and it didn't matter to them if you were a Gentile, you still were "Jewish" in their opinion.

Significance was that Jews were despised (anti-semitism).

Friedlander, in his "Roman Life and Manners under the Early Empire" writes about this ==>

"According to Tacitus [the Jews] taught their [converts] above all to despise the gods, to renounce their fatherland, to disregard parents, children, brothers, sisters. According to Juvenal, Moses taught the Jews not to show anyone the way, nor to guide the thirsty traveler to the spring, except he were a Jew. Apion declares that, in the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes, the Jews every year fattened a Greek, and having solemnly offered him up as a Sacrifice on a fixed day in a certain forest, ate his [intestines] and swore eternal hostility to the Greeks." [cited in Barclay, 202]

(b) Later Christians were slandered on their own merits

Romans accused them of cannibalism (last supper) & incest (they called each other "brother/sister" and had "Agape or love feasts" which t/Romans claimed were drunken orgies). Were accused of impeding trade (cf. Acts 19:21-41). Were accused of atheism (not worshipping Roman gods). Were accused of treason for not worshipping the Caesar ("offer incense to Caesar and proclaim him Lord").

In the early part of the 3rd c. Celsus accused the Xns of being ignorant, foolish, and superstitious. He leveled all kinds of charges against them with one exception: immorality.

(3) We can turn the clock ahead to the 20th c.

On March 6, 1927 British philosopher, Bertrand Russell (died on my birthday in 1970), delivered his famous essay to the National Secular

Society, in London entitled "Why I Am Not A Christian." In this essay Russell accuses Xns and t/CH of evil. He writes ==>

There are a great many ways in which, at the present moment, the church, by its insistence upon what it chooses to call morality, inflicts upon all sorts of people undeserved and unnecessary suffering. And of course, as we know, it is in its major part an opponent still of progress and improvement in all the ways that diminish suffering in the world, because it has chosen to label as morality a certain narrow set of rules of conduct which have nothing to do with human happiness

His final conclusion:

Religion is based, I think, primarily and mainly upon fear. It is partly the terror of the unknown and partly, as I have said, the wish to feel that you have a kind of elder brother who will stand by you in all your troubles and disputes. ... A good world needs knowledge, kindness, and courage; it does not need a regretful hankering after the past or a fettering of the free intelligence by the words uttered long ago by ignorant men.

We need to be prepared. As Peter later writes in chapt. 3 ==>

15 but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; 16 and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.

Part of that apologia or apologetic includes defending our worldview as t/only one that is completely rational and defensible.

1. How can I maintain my witness in a hostile society?

a. #1 - Stand Sentry: Guard your Behavior

b. #2 Stay Separate: Transform Culture Don't let Culture Transform You

c. #3 Suppose Slander: Assume Accusations Against Anything Absolute

d. #4 Stickless Sin: Be a Teflon Disciple

The infamous NY Mobster, John Gotti became known as "The Teflon Don" because charges against him didn't stick.

In a not-too-similar way we need to be "teflon disciples" t/difference being that we live our lives in such a way that no charge of wrong-doing or immorality can be brought against us.

That's the

Keep[ing] your behavior excellent among the pagans...
part.

Why? ==>

. . . so that in whatever they accuse you as evildoers, they may see your good works and glorify God in the day of visitation.

When Plato was told that a certain man was slandering him and accusing him of things he did not do, his response was, "I will live in such a way that no one will believe what he says." [Barclay, 203]

In t/passage we just read, Peter says ==>

. . . keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.

Later Peter wrote (4:14-16).

(1) The objective is that people see what in you?

(a) Good works

i. Again we see the adjective καλος - beautiful, good

Common word used no less than 100x in NT. Generally translated "good" but is translated "honest" 2x in KJV – Parallel being t/Latin word "honestus" (handsome, gracious, winsome). That's basically what this word means: handsome, gracious, winsome, noble.

They will accuse you of evil, yet under close scrutiny they will see your goodness, your X-likeness.

One commentator observes ==>

"No Christian was found in prison for crime, but only for the faith. The heathen excluded slaves from some of their religious services, whereas Christians had some of their presbyters of the class of slaves. Slavery silently and gradually disappeared by the power of the Christian law of love, "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." When the pagans deserted their nearest relatives in a plague, Christians ministered to the sick and dying. When the Gentiles left their dead unburied after a battle and cast their wounded into the streets, the disciples hastened to relieve the suffering." [JFB]

(2) The picture here is one of close examination

The word is used of close scrutiny Observation that leads t/observer to a change of mind [Michaels, 118]

Same word used in 3:2 of wives w/unsaved husbands {read}

Every Xn is an advertisement; a walking sandwich sign for Xnty.

I cringe when I hear about some professed Christian who willfully denies the faith with his or her life. How many times have I heard of some (professed) believer who does this? The stories are legion. Many times t/reason for the default is a member of t/opp. sex. That's something that will certainly test whether your appetite is for X. I know of a man whose brother was an elder in his church. This elder was considered by t/CH a gifted preacher and teacher. This man met a younger woman at work, began an illicit relationship that he would not relinquish. The man whom I know (I really didn't know his wayward brother) once told me that during this time he saw pornographic videos in his brother's car trunk. The man eventually divorced his middle-aged wife for the younger woman whom he eventually married.

I think back to my college years. I had a professor who was a gifted theologian and scientist. I admired his balance of theological knowledge and practical devotion. During the first gulf war, this professor disappeared. The story was that it was because he was serving in the reserves. Only part of the story. I later found out that the real reason was that he was having an affair with a woman in his platoon. He later divorced his wife. As he left his home his daughter was literally clinging to his legs pleading w/him not to leave.

What are people thinking? On one level, it is sheer stupidity. Character is character and if you think you can enter into an adulterous relationship and then be secure you are a fool. You're an even bigger fool if you think that you can get away with it before God.

Other lesser evils. Language or attitudes. Compromise. Dishonesty. Etc.

Romans 2:24 For “the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you,” . . .

Let that never be said of us.

We would be wise to follow the advice of Proverbs 4:24-27 ==>

24 Put away from you a deceitful mouth, And put devious lips far from you.
25 Let your eyes look directly ahead, And let your gaze be fixed straight in front of you. 26 Watch the path of your feet, And all your ways will be established.
27 Do not turn to the right nor to the left; Turn your foot from evil.

Last point (make it brief as we're out of time)

e. Sovereign Salvation: God will use you to save others

Someone once said that "the strongest missionary force in the world is the Christian's life." [Barclay, 202]

(1) This is how Peter ends; this is the purpose

Keep your behavior excellent among the pagans, so that in whatever they accuse you as evildoers, they may see your good works and glorify God in the day of visitation.

No doubt, Peter harkened back to the words of Jesus:

Matthew 5:16 **“Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.**

When do these people glorify God? What is Peter referring to?

Probably refers to unbelievers who come to faith as a result of a positive Christian testimony.

Note the parallel in 3:2 where the same verb "see" is used and refers to the salvation of lost husbands.

. . . the day of visitation.

An OT concept referred to blessing or judgement.

Blessing for believers; judgement for unbelievers.

Our attitude toward the lost should be like that of C.H. Spurgeon ==>

"Oh my brothers and sisters in Christ, if sinners will be damned, at least let them leap to hell over our bodies; and if they will perish, let them perish with our arms about their knees, imploring them to stay, and not madly to destroy themselves. If hell must be filled, at least let it be filled in the teeth of our exertions, and let no one go there unwarned and unprayed for." [C.H. Spurgeon]