

## CHRISTIANS AMONG THE GENTILES (1/2)

### *An Exposition of 1 Peter 2.11, 12*

As we work through 1 Peter chapter 2, we have noticed that the church is identified, from our special relationship to Jesus Christ, in five different ways in verses 4-10: we are a spiritual temple, a holy priesthood, believers who love Christ, the new Israel, and God's chosen people by His mercy through Christ our Lord.

Having established our unique spiritual identity, Peter proceeds to tell us of our unique spiritual calling, and this is a calling which is to be worked out in this present age as we dwell among unbelievers, referred to spiritually as Gentiles.

**<sup>11</sup> Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; <sup>12</sup> 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.**

Amen. The Lord has spoken. The main idea of this passage can be stated like this:

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*Christians fulfilling our unique calling will provoke Gentiles to comment about it.*

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We really should embrace the way that the apostle Peter thought about Christianity in this regard: real Christians are the spiritual Jews in the world, and all others, spiritually speaking, are Gentiles—a term which means “the nations,” that is, the nations that are not God's chosen people, people who are not Jews. As we explained last time, true Christians are spiritual Jews, no matter whether we considered ourselves Jews or Gentiles prior to our conversion to Christ. We are not “Gentiles” any longer, not in the way that Peter is using the term. Likewise, all who are not true Christians, spiritually speaking, they are the Gentiles, no matter whether they think of themselves as Jews or not. For sure, Peter uses the term “Gentiles” here to mean all the people that are not Christians, people who do not love Jesus Christ. They worship idols and are slaves to their sins of all kinds. That would embrace all the so-called Jews who do not love Jesus. Let us pray that all the misguided Christians who keep referring to some of the non-Christians as Jews would reconsider this confusion of categories. You might have heard of an organization called “The International Fellowship of Christians and Jews.” This title alone is very misleading propaganda, and their advertisements take it further and refer to non-Christian Jews as “God's chosen people.” That is not true! Any so-called Jews who don't believe in Jesus are really Gentiles in spiritual terms. Only Christians are God's chosen people now. People should only be recognized as true Jews if and when they repent and believe in Jesus. There is no fellowship between Christians and these apostate infidels (2 Cor 6.14, 15).

As Christians, spiritual Jews living in a society dominated by Gentiles who know not God, we have special responsibilities and opportunities among them. We have a unique calling as Christians among the Gentiles, and the Gentiles will inevitably respond with commentary about us, both in this life and the next at the Judgment Day. And because they are talking about us now and will have something to say at the end, it matters very much how we Christians live in front of them in this life. That is the basic topic Peter addresses in our sermon text, 1 Peter 2.11 and 12. Because of the constraints of time, we will only expound verse eleven today, and take up verse twelve next Lord's Day, God willing.

#### I. Our Unique Calling (11, 12a)

We have a unique calling as Christians in the world, a calling to think of ourselves as in a different category altogether than all who are not Christians, and to realize that this world is not our home, and to lead a much better kind of life than our non-Christian neighbors.

First, know for sure and take it to heart that you are especially loved. That is what the phrase “dearly beloved,” means, and it is addressed to you Christians in particular. Many people hear that phrase “dearly beloved” from a pulpit, for example, and think of it just as pious-sounding religious talk, suitable for church. It is so much more than that. The reason “dearly beloved” is proper for church gatherings and no other setting is because the church is the only divinely-ordained organization in the world that is to be composed of only Christians as members. And as Christians, we must know ourselves to be those whom God loves in a gracious way with a purpose to save our souls for time and eternity. Now some of God’s elect are not yet converted and they are also loved before time just as we are, but it is not yet apparent who they are while they are still unconverted. However, when we come together as Christ’s church, a congregation of believers, it is in our identity as those “dearly beloved people,” loved supremely like no one else. First of all, God loves us so much as to have given His only begotten Son on the cross for our salvation. Second, God’s faithful servants like the apostles and Christian pastors and even other real Christians love us more than we love other people—and with good reason—because God has a special love for us.

By calling us “dearly beloved” here, Peter implies that taking this special blessing to heart is conducive to our being able to hear, with hope and submissiveness, the exhortation to be holy. The fear of hell will not make you holy. It will not transform you to be like Jesus. Did you know that? But to know that God loves you supremely by His grace even though in yourselves you are only wretched and guilty sinners—that melts hearts of stone and wins our devotion to God. The law only tells us what to do and would leave us spiritually dead. The gospel of God’s love in Christ quickens us to live for God as His holy people.

Second, we are temporarily displaced. We are “strangers and pilgrims.” Here we have another example of language that was used of the OT Jews in the Promised Land (Lev 25.23) being applied seamlessly to the Christians of the NT church. The word “strangers” has the sense of foreigners, and “pilgrims” means those on the move to a sacred place for religious reasons. These two terms together are also found in Hebrews 11.13, “These [believers] all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.” They did not consider the time of their earthly lives and the place of their earthly dwelling to be their true home. But they desired a better country, that is, a heavenly country (Heb 11.16). And in this way they are just like us Christians today, and we should realize that we really are like them, “strangers and pilgrims” in this world, where “men of the world [i.e., Gentiles] have their portion in this life” (Psa 17.14). These words, strangers and pilgrims, are

epitomes of the Christian attitude to the world. . . . The Christian is essentially a temporary resident in this world. He is a person who is essentially on the way. He may be here but his roots are not here, and his permanent home is not here. He is always living as one who is looking beyond. . . . The very fact that the Christian is a stranger and a pilgrim and a sojourner is the proof that comfort is the last thing that he can expect in life, and that an easy popularity is not for him. . . . To the Christian the world can never be an end and a goal in itself; the Christian is ever a pilgrim who is on the way (Barclay, *New Testament Words*, p. 288 ff.).

Brethren, knowing that we are resident aliens in a spiritually-foreign country and that heaven is our true home has vast implications for how we think and live while we are here. Unbelievers conduct themselves as if this life is all there is. If the dead do not rise, then, “Let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we die” (1 Cor 15.32). We know better. “What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole

world, and lose his own soul?" (Mark 8.36). We know that we are behind enemy lines and must be on guard constantly against spiritual enemies. Spiritual and moral danger surrounds us, and this calls for our being morally alert and committed to faithfulness at all times to the King of our homeland, even Jesus, until we see Him face to face. We are like the American airmen of World War II who had to jump out of their planes and parachute over German territory. Our great desire is to make it home alive.

So you who are dearly beloved strangers and pilgrims must live a godly life. Notice,

Third, we are urgently exhorted. "I beseech you." Beseech is a word we never use in casual conversation, but it is a great word. It means to beg for something urgently or anxiously, and to request earnestly. This is very nearly the exact sense of the Greek word behind it: to urge strongly, appeal to, urge, exhort, encourage (BDAG).

Peter's urgent exhortation amounts to this: lead holy lives. Conduct yourselves in a morally superior way to the Gentiles. And not only superior, but utterly distinctive, so that your lifestyle, with regard to its spiritual and moral quality, is really quite incomparable to how non-Christians live.

Now in Scripture there are many exhortations like this to Christians, but notice carefully the three parts of this one. We'll consider the first two today and the third next week.

First, "abstain from fleshly lusts." This is a great translation here, but other attempts are helpful. "Do not give in to bodily passions." Do not "indulge the cravings of your lower natures." "Abstain from the sensual urges." "Keep yourselves free from the disordered natural inclinations." One way to look at this exhortation is that it describes typical Gentile behavior as morally reprehensible. They indulge fleshly lusts, carnal desires, all the time. In fact, they are willing slaves to these desires. They live by the motto, "if it feels good, do it." If they are crassly immoral, they do it out in the open. If they still have something of a conscience, much of it happens behind closed doors. The apostle Paul described the godless sensual culture of his own day like this in Ephesians 4:

<sup>17</sup> This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, <sup>18</sup> having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: <sup>19</sup> who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.

We're talking very much about sexual immorality here, but not only that. It encompasses venting your anger, gluttony and drunkenness, and coveting your neighbor's stuff, which is idolatry (Col 3.5), and more than these things, too. It is the lifestyle that reduces people from morally-intelligent, God-honoring, self-controlled human beings to some degree toward soulless animals like pigs and dogs that operate more on physical impulses and instinct than on any consideration of spiritual things. Hasn't our cultural moment become worse and worse in these ways, as just about every lust of the flesh seems to be practiced openly, and even celebrated? Large groups of these sinners are even demanding that everyone else affirm them and express approval for their disgusting perversions! Surely, we live in Sodom and Gomorrah!

And Peter's strong appeal here to you Christians is to "abstain" from these fleshly lusts—not to cut back on them a little, or only do them once in a while and in private, for the sake of your testimony. No! To "abstain" means to restrain yourself from doing something. One who abstains from wine never drinks it. One who abstains from sex never has it. One who abstains from unrighteous anger never loses his temper. Abstinence implies a zero tolerance policy. And we should have a zero tolerance policy in our own lives for fleshly lusts. The Greek word translated abstain means to avoid contact with something, or to avoid the use of something. It means to keep away from it, period. We are being called to the daily, hourly, minutely practice of principled self-denial and resistance of worldly

temptations to sin in all kinds of ways that are really just typical lifestyles of the godless Gentiles all around us.

Look, when you live in the sewer for long enough, the filth doesn't smell so bad anymore. You get used to it, desensitized, as if, just because it is everywhere, it is normal and to be accepted as the status quo, even for us. We begin "slouching toward Gomorrah," as Robert Bork put it. We are witnessing firsthand in our society the phenomena of "defining deviancy down" to quote Daniel Patrick Moynihan, the tendency of societies to respond to destructive behaviors by lowering standards for what is permissible. And Christians are not safe from this evil world's whirling flush of the toilet. God's Word here re-sensitizes us. It sets forth God's high and holy standard and inspires us to be people confessing our sins and mortifying our carnal lusts that still remain in our sinful hearts. Don't live like the people who hate God! Show yourself to be Christ's free man! Throw off the shackles of the devil that used to hold you down! Soar in the heavenly places of true spirituality with the saints and angels of all ages! You don't have to look at pornography on the Internet—in fact, as a Christian, you must not! Clean up your entertainment choices. Never tell dirty jokes or laugh at others who do. Don't give up the battle to eat sensibly and to drink only in careful moderation, if at all. The way you think, the way you talk, the way you dress, the way you spend your money, the music you enjoy, the things you read—let it all be squeaky-clean, morally speaking. That is God's will for us as Christians, brethren. Can I make it any plainer than that?

Second, realize that these lusts "war against the soul," that is, they constantly attack your soul, testing its defenses, infiltrating wherever they can, seeking its overthrow. Left unchecked, fleshly lusts would be spiritually fatal to you, binding you over to spiritual death and damnation. To abstain from fleshly lusts, you must practice what Scripture and the old Christian writers commonly called "mortification," that is, you must wage war against sin to put it to death. The apostle Paul wrote, "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth" (Col 3.5), and by members, he meant "the corruption that is in our mortal bodies" (Owen, Works 6.198). Commenting on this verse, the Puritan John Owen famously wrote, "Make [mortification] your daily work; be always at it while you live; cease not a day from this work; be killing sin or it will be killing you" (Owen, Works 6.9). This constant spiritual warfare against sin in your heart must continue unabated because

indwelling sin always abides [with us] while we are in this world. . . . Sin does not only still abide with us, but it is still acting, still laboring to bring forth the deeds of the flesh. . . . If not continually mortified, [sin in us] will bring forth great, cursed, scandalous, soul-destroying sins. . . . This is one main reason why the Spirit and the new nature is given to us,—that we may have a principle within to oppose sin and lust. . . . Where sin, through the neglect of mortification, gets a considerable victory, it breaks the bones of the soul and makes a man weak, sick, and ready to die, so that he cannot look up. . . . Do we not see those, whom we knew [formerly] to be humble, melting, broken-hearted Christians, tender and fearful to offend, zealous for God and all His ways, His Sabbaths and His ordinances, [having become], through a neglect of [consistent mortification], earthly, carnal, cold, wrathful, complying with the men of the world and the things of the world, to the scandal of [Christian] religion and [to] the fearful temptation of them that know them? (Owen, Works 6.10 ff.).

Oh, dearly beloved brethren! I thank God that none of you, as far as I know, are in that wretched condition that Mr. Owen describes, but unless you abstain from fleshly lusts in the future, unless you keep up a constant fight to resist these temptations and to repent again and again and again whenever you have even slightly fallen in them, you will surely lose the battle to a great degree! That is why, in the name of God and in agreement with this great passage of Scripture, I also exhort you, as strangers and pilgrims in this world, to abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul!

That is enough for all of us to absorb, process, and apply today from the preaching. We will postpone the rest of the exposition until another time. Until then, may God be pleased to sanctify and protect His holy people. Amen.

## CHRISTIANS AMONG THE GENTILES (2/2)

### *An Exposition of 1 Peter 2.11, 12*

Peter's first epistle presents a dichotomy between Christians (now aka Jews) and non-Christians (now aka Gentiles). Christians have a unique calling. First, know and take to heart that you are especially loved by God and by Christ's ministers. Second, know that you are temporarily displaced in this present age and world. It is not your true spiritual home. You are just passing through on your way to glory. Third, you are urgently exhorted to abstain from the fleshly lusts constantly indulged by non-Christians because these lusts or sinful desires war against your soul. You are called to mortify them and to live in the holy power of our risen Lord Jesus Christ.

That summarizes our preaching last Sunday from our text, 1 Peter 2.11, 12. Today we would continue and conclude the exposition. Here, God's Word says,

**<sup>11</sup> Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; <sup>12</sup> 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.**

Amen. The Lord has spoken. The main idea of this passage can be stated like this:

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To resume, then, we must not skip over the third aspect of the exhortation to Christians here. In abstaining from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, you will possess a spiritually and morally good lifestyle among non-Christians. This is the point made by the beginning of verse 12, "having your conversation honest among the Gentiles." That lifestyle is further described as "your good works, which they shall behold."

The old word "conversation" in our translation was once commonly understood to mean "behavior" in general, especially with respect to your morals. The original term so translated means "conduct expressed according to certain principles" (BDAG). It has an "apparent focus upon overt daily behavior" (LN 41.3). It is a term for how you act, morally or not, on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, not only on Sunday when you are gathered as the church. Our daily, habitual manner of living is a truer test of what we really believe; we are governed more by our actual beliefs than by any lofty ideals we may have in our minds that gain a certain mental assent.

Now in this passage of contrast between the Christians and the non-Christians, Peter is definitely implying that there is one habitual manner of conducting oneself which must characterize Christians, and another habitual manner of conducting oneself that actually characterizes non-Christians, and these two lifestyles—one Christian and one non-Christian—are noticeably different. Not only Christians know we are different in this way, but even non-Christians will be able to observe and recognize that we are different from them in the way we habitually conduct ourselves.

What is the difference? Well, Christian behavior is "honest," to quote the translation here. And what would that make the non-Christian behavior in contrast? Dishonest. Again, it helps if you understand an older sense of the term "honest." It used to mean "upright; just; fair in dealing with others; free from tricks and fraud; acting and having the disposition to act at all times according to justice or correct moral principles" (Webster 1828), and, "just, righteous, giving to every man his due" (SJ Dict. 1773). That is honest conduct. The Greek word translated "honest" here means morally good, morally excellent even. It takes the general word for something that is meeting high standards or

expectations of quality and applies it to a person's daily, typical, ordinary ethical conduct. When a true Christian is at his or her best, there is goodness, truth, and beauty in every act, something of supreme love to God and unselfish love to neighbor in everything that has a moral aspect. Their behavior is spiritually and ethically noble, pure, caring, considerate, humble, kind, faithful, self-denying, self-controlled, patient, magnanimous, and so forth. And Peter is calling Christians to live like this every day in every way consistently without sinning, without giving in to your sinful desires to cut corners morally, to look out for yourself without caring about others, to cheat, steal, lie, and to follow your heart rather than God's Word, to quench and grieve the Holy Spirit, to lose your temper, abuse others verbally and psychologically, to speak flippantly about God and anything associated with Him, and so forth. The morally good lifestyle is only truly practiced by Christians; the morally bad lifestyle is the universal practice of non-Christians. "Have your behavior among the non-Christians to be honest, good, upright, pure, unimpeachable." That is the sense of Peter's strong exhortation here. Make a consistent habit of living every day, every hour, every minute blamelessly, clearly applying correct moral principles. Do this in private, with your family members, with your coworkers, with your neighbors in the community, when you're driving, when you're shopping, when you're attending some community event, and in whatever you might do from day to day.

This is what it means to fill your life consistently with "good works," a phrase also mentioned here in verse 12. The word translated "good" is another form of the word translated "honest," and the word for "works" simply means deeds. Your deeds are whatever you do.

I think there is some confusion today about what constitute "good works" in the Christian life. At this time in the calendar year, many Christians think it is a good work to have a cross of ashes smeared on your forehead by a minister and to give up chocolate, for example, for 40 days during a period that they call "Lent." These are not good works; people actually should not do these things. Roman Catholics think good works include prayers to the Virgin Mary and using a rosary and lighting candles in a church building and things like that. None of these are good works either; in fact, they are sins. In the days of Jesus, merely human traditions like these had multiplied among the Jews and were considered to be good works, but Jesus taught otherwise.

What actually are good works, then? Our 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith helpfully says,

Good works are only such as God hath commanded in his Holy Word, and not such as without the warrant thereof are devised by men out of blind zeal, or upon any pretense of good intentions (2LCF 16.1).

Good works by definition are essentially just doing what God has commanded in His Word, period. That is why observing Lent is not a good work, nor praying to Mary, nor using rosary beads, nor lighting candles in church, nor all kinds of other things people do. God never commanded these things. But loving God supremely and loving your neighbor as yourself, and confessing Christ as your Savior, and being baptized, and serving as a committed member of a local church, and honoring your parents, and being faithful to your spouse, and doing business uprightly without any compromise of truth and integrity, and showing compassion in practical ways to the poor—all these and so many more things are good works. Oh, and we must qualify all this. We must also do these things from "a heart purified by faith, in a right manner according to His Word, and to a right end, even the glory of God." This is to be the consistent, habitual manner of life of each and every Christian: carrying out God's revealed will as your rule of life, day in and day out, consistently.

The 1689, chapter 16, about good works, says so many other helpful things, and I commend it to your study. But before we move on to the next part of our biblical text, listen carefully to another paragraph from the Confession which says non-Christians really never do any good works at all.

Works done by unregenerate men [i.e., non-Christians], although for the matter of them they may be things which God commands, and of good use both to themselves and others; yet because they proceed not from a heart purified by faith, nor are done in a right manner according to the word, nor to a right end, the glory of God, they are therefore sinful, and cannot please God, nor make a man meet [fit or prepared] to receive grace from God (2LCF 16.7).

In other words, what may look to you like good works done by non-Christians are not really good works at all in the sight of God, who looks not only on the outward appearance but also upon the heart of the person doing those works. And without faith, it is impossible to please God (Heb 11.6). In fact, without faith, all of an unbeliever's supposed "righteousnesses" are just filthy rags in God's estimation (Isa 64.6), just so many odious sins to be condemned on Judgment Day and punished for all eternity.

So much from this text for the Christian's unique calling. The rest of the passage deals with the non-Christian's unavoidable commentary.

## II. Their Unavoidable Commentary (12b ff.)

The last part of our text says,

**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.**

It is critically important that you obey all this godly counsel for your own good, but another important reason to obey is the response of the Gentiles, that is, the non-Christians. Their response to your godly Christian life takes place in two phases. Phase one is in this life. Phase two will be at Judgment Day.

But Peter explains that before they comment about your godly lifestyle, they will behold it. "They shall behold" "your good works," Peter says. The verb means "to observe something, implying both continuity and intent" (LN 24.45). One says it means "to follow with the eyes or the mind" (LBSL), and another, "to look at or behold attentively, contemplate closely" (GELNT). I think we really need to be more aware of that at all times than we generally are. People are watching you and noticing whether you lead a truly Christian life or not. Not just people in the church are observing your ways—and we are doing that—but even non-Christians are sizing you up, morally speaking. And they tend to scrutinize you even more once they know you identify as a Christian.

When I was in college, I had a non-Christian roommate. We shared quarters for months and that gave us an unusual familiarity with one another's personality, habits, opinions, and, yes, real, practiced morality. My roommate was a friendly sinner, you could say. We got along well. He knew I was a professing Christian. But I did not realize how observant he was until he pointed out a moral inconsistency in my life. This happened over 40 years ago and I still remember it with real regret. He seemed genuinely disappointed that I had failed to live up to the standard he had expected from a Christian. And he was right to expose me. I still feel embarrassed about that, and I know that I let him down.

The non-Christians are beholding you, too, my friend. They are observing your ways and watching to see if you live like a Christian, if they know you claim to be one. They probably won't tell you all they're thinking, but don't you doubt for one second that the ones who know you personally are noticing how you live.

Now look at the first phase of the non-Christian commentary on your Christian lifestyle. Peter says,



First, they will slander you now. “Whereas they speak against you as evildoers.” As a new Christian, I remember thinking that if I would really be devoted to the Lord Jesus Christ and follow Him with all my heart, and have some consistency in this, then everyone who knew me would surely be impressed and tell me how wonderful I was. And no doubt, I wanted to hear this in my pride. Now it is true that a non-Christian will, occasionally and as an exception to the rule, tell a Christian that they seem to be a very good person and commend them for it. That happens sometimes. But as a rule, the better your example, the more it will tend to annoy the non-Christians. It will get under their skin because it will expose their immorality as avoidable and wrong. It will also bother them because they will assume you think you are better than other people and are proud of yourself. Certainly they would be proud, if they judged themselves to be morally superior. And so, instead of winning their admiration and praise by your godly example, you will more likely provoke them to resentment and sometimes even anger. “They” will “speak against you as evildoers,” even though they are the evildoers and you are the good doers.

Here is another bit of naïveté from my younger years. I assumed that people who give themselves over to all kinds of immorality know it is wrong and feel really, really guilty about it. Again, that is sometimes the case, but more often, they have an incredible ability to rationalize their sins—even the most egregious—as being okay for one reason or another. And get this, they sometimes think that their sinning in certain ways makes them morally superior to you who won’t do what they do. They glory in their shame, Scripture says (Phil 3.19). They call good evil and evil good (Isa 5.20). They not only do things worthy of death, but have pleasure in others who do them (Rom 1.31). And they have displeasure in those who refuse to do them, too.

I know this is hard to believe, but pro-abortionists supporting the massacre of the unborn generally think they are the ones with high moral principles, crusaders for a righteous cause. And they think the pro-life community is a bunch of low-life creepy people who must hate women and don’t believe in women’s rights. Champions of immorality in our culture refer to Christians with biblical moral principles as homophobes, transphobic, Islamophobes, bigots, racists, and, as one of them has said, “a basket of deplorables.” They judge us and hate us!

Later in 1 Peter, it says,

<sup>3</sup> For the time past of *our* life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries: <sup>4</sup> wherein they think it strange that you run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of *you* (1 Pet 4.3, 4).

You’ve either heard this from them or you probably will hear it. “Oh, look over there. There’s that one that thinks they’re a Christian. They think they’re too good to go to the party with us (or) they would not attend that LGBTQ wedding even though it was for someone who supposedly was their friend (or) they are messing up our family get together because they insist on going to church every Sunday.”

So prepare to be criticized and vilified and ostracized and misunderstood and slandered by non-Christians when they behold your good works in this life, and find some way to twist everything around and make you out to be the bad guy. And listen, many of the non-Christians in our day identify as Christians and justify the same immoralities and target the same moral conservatives within the church. Not all that glitters is gold. Not everyone claiming to be a Christian really is one.

We have to wrap this up by noticing the second phase of the non-Christian commentary on your godly lifestyle. That second phase awaits the return of Jesus Christ from heaven for us His beloved disciples, and to judge all His impenitent, unbelieving enemies, that have been so slandering His disciples since the beginning of the world.

Second, they will glorify God later. Peter conveys this by the phrase, they will “glorify God in the day of visitation.” What does that mean?

Well, in general, it is clear enough. When God visits humanity in some way, then the non-Christians will glorify God in some way. In the details, however, this is debated to some extent by Bible students. Here is what I sincerely think it means.

First of all, the day of visitation is most likely referring to Judgment Day. The idiom of God visiting His people or His enemies is found throughout Scripture as referring to various dramatic events that happen, when God “intervenes,” so to speak, for the deliverance of His people and for the overthrow of our enemies. Now God does not really “intervene” because He is at work all the time in everything. That is called the doctrine of Providence. However, sometimes the work of God is more dramatic than at other times, and therefore more noticeable. When God saved the Jews following Moses by drowning the Egyptian soldiers, that was a divine visitation, for example. But all these acts of salvation through judgment which glorify God in redemptive history are mini-visitations of God which precede the one, great cataclysmic visitation that will happen on the last day of this present age, the day of Christ’s return, Judgment Day. I am persuaded that Peter had that great day in mind by this passage. The non-Christians will glorify God somehow on Judgment Day.

Second, the question remains, how will the non-Christians glorify God on Judgment Day? Will they repent and be saved on that day? No, there’s no hope for that, because Judgment Day will be a day of grace only for those who are already saved. For the rest, to quote the prophet in Amos chapter five,

- 18 Woe unto you that desire the day of the Lord!  
To what end is it for you?  
The day of the Lord is darkness, and not light.
- 19 As if a man did flee from a lion, and a bear met him;  
Or went into the house, and leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him.
- 20 Shall not the day of the Lord be darkness, and not light?  
Even very dark, and no brightness in it?

So on that day, most likely what Peter means is that the reprobate sinners who had slandered Christians doing good deeds in this life will be speechless when the Lord Jesus Christ, upon His glorious throne, commends those very same Christians for their good works and condemns our slanderers for their wickedness. For that is the day that “every mouth will be stopped, and all the world become [manifestly] guilty before God” (Rom 3.19). And their silence is a form of commentary!

On that great day of mercy to the saints and wrath upon the sinners, the lost will be very much like the man in the parable who wasn’t wearing the appropriate wedding garment—an emblem for righteousness God approves. Do you remember what Jesus said? “And when the king came in to see the guests, . . . he saith unto [one], Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen” (Matt 22.12-14). As Jonathan Edwards commented,

When the King of heaven and earth comes to judgment, their consciences will be so perfectly enlightened and convinced by the all-searching Light they shall then stand in, that their mouths will be effectually stopped, as to all excuses for themselves, all pleading of their own righteousness to excuse or justify them, and all objections against the justice of their Judge, that their conscience will condemn them only, and not God (“True Grace Distinguished from the Experience of Devils,” Works of JE, BOT edition, 2.44).

The Judge will reckon with them, they shall be speechless, they shall be struck dumb, their own consciences bearing testimony against them, and shall cry aloud against them, for they shall then see how great and terrible a God he is, against whom they have sinned. Then shall they stand at the left hand, while they see others whom they knew on earth sitting at the right hand of Christ in glory, shining forth as the sun, accepted of Christ, and sitting with him to judge and condemn them (“Sermon VI on Luke 22:44,” Works of JE, BOT edition, 2.882).

This horrified speechlessness of the damned will glorify God, you see, because it will show that there was absolutely no justification whatsoever for slandering God’s holy people, and that such slander only came from depraved souls because of their malice toward God Himself. All the true pastors, so unjustly criticized by both open unbelievers and hypocrites, will be vindicated on that day and their critics will be exposed as evil. All the faithful saints who have endured similar slander will also have their day of vindication and their wicked unsaved husbands and wives and parents and children and neighbors and coworkers will go down to their own place. Because, among their many other sins, they have spoken against Christians as evildoers, so they deserve and shall have eternal, conscious torments of body and soul, all to the glory of God’s holy wrath and glorious justice.

Beloved, may God have mercy on us now, enabling us as Christians to lead godly lives, and moving unbelievers to repent and believe the gospel, while there is still an opportunity to be saved. Amen.