

1st PETER BIBLE STUDY

1 Peter 3:1-12

Lesson #13

Introduction

This is the next part in our series we've titled "A Christian's Responsibilities."

Part 1: Chapter 2:11-12	Conduct Among the Gentiles	Lesson #10
Part 2: Chapter 2:13-20	Honoring Designated Authorities	Lesson #11
Part 3: Chapter 2:20-25	Suffering for Righteousness	Lesson #12
Part 4: Chapter 3:1-12	Personal Relationships	Lesson #13

A Christian's Responsibilities (Pt-4) (Personal Relationships)

Verses 1-6:

1 In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, 2 as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior. 3 Your adornment must not be merely external—braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses; 4 but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God. 5 For in this way in former times the holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves, being submissive to their own husbands; 6 just as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, and you have become her children if you do what is right without being frightened by any fear.

1 Peter 3:1-6 (NASB)

Previously Peter has been speaking "generally" regarding behavior and submission to governing authorities that applies to all alike, but at this point he gets gender specific, because some behaviors do in fact differ according to gender. He's already addressed both free men and slaves as to their behavioral responsibilities according to the scriptures. But here Peter speaks to the women regarding their biblical mandates of behaviors in respect to their husbands. Yes, God has designated a particular hierarchy of authority within marriages just as He has within governments and kingdoms and classes. He is no respecter of persons as the scriptures tell us, but He does require us all to submit to those authorities under which He has sovereignly placed us to live our lives.

We can't all be the king of the country, we can't all be the general of the army, and we can't all be the president of our company, we are what we are, and there we serve the Lord in the capacity that He has placed us. We serve with the integrity of a royal priesthood, and we keep our behaviors excellent among the gentiles as a holy nation, and if God wishes to promote us He will, and if He wishes to demote us He will, but either way we serve with unwavering loyalty. Because, whether we're a king or we're a servant, whether we're male or female, we are a royal priesthood, and our designated duty while we live this life on earth, is to demonstrate the moral and virtuous excellencies of our Redeemer, through our own visible actions and behaviors. Whether male or female we are all nonetheless joint heirs with Jesus of His eternal kingdom. And likewise we are all under obligation to live in submission to His authority by honoring those whom He has sovereignly placed us under while in this life.

Peter gives some valuable instruction to women regarding their proper actions towards their husbands, and according to the context of this verse it would appear that he's talking about unbelieving husbands. It tells you ladies that the primary tool which the Lord has afforded you for ministry to your unbelieving husbands is your chaste lifestyle and respectful behavior. Ladies, let me assure you that you will not be able to argue, or nag your husbands into submission to the word of God. It is the Holy Spirit that quickens and regenerates the spiritually dead, and you as wives of unbelievers can be used by Him to influence his receptiveness to the Holy Spirit's work. It might happen quickly, or it might take quite some time, or it may never happen at all, but your tools and your procedures do not waver, because in the final analysis the decision is the Lord's, and we all bow our knee in subjection to His authority.

Peter goes on to further clarify this point by saying that your adornment must not be merely external, note the word merely here. This is not saying that you should not dress nicely, it's saying, that's not all you should do. Your adornment should be both external and internal. You should adorn yourself nicely and look pretty, but more importantly you should adorn yourselves internally with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God, says Peter. And precious in the sight of most men as well, says this preacher. In verses five and six Peter uses Abraham's wife Sarah as an example of a godly wife, by pointing out her respectful submission to her husband, and says you have become her children if you do what is right without being frightened by any fear.

I had to spend some time on this last sentence concerning being frightened by any fear. Within the context of his speaking it's not immediately clear what Peter means by these words. For instance, is he talking about fear of being offensive to their husbands, or fear of offending the Lord? Certainly being the wife of an unbelieving husband will put a woman in many difficult positions. Just as being a citizen of a pagan nation will put any people in difficult situations. In researching this I found differing points of view, but the one which I found that appears to most accurately capture the context, and remain consistent to the broader teachings of Scripture came from Calvin's commentaries. Where Calvin himself quoted the words of someone called MacKnight. And this is what he wrote:

The words are, "Whose daughters ye become, when ye do well and fear no terror." The paraphrase of MacKnight seems to give the real and simple meaning of the passage, "Whose daughters ye Christian women have become, by behaving well towards your husbands, and not being frightened to actions contrary to your religion through fear of displeasing them."

I am in complete agreement with Calvin on MacKnight's analysis of this verse. This verse is telling women not to compromise their chaste behavior and observance of God's commandments because they are fearful that it will be displeasing to their husbands. Compromising their integrity will diminish the effectiveness of their witness. For both male and female, either in marriages or just in personal relationships, maintaining our integrity to scriptures, while at the very same time doing our absolute best to be gentle and respectful to others is how we conduct our priestly activity. This is the only interpretation that fits the broader context of Scriptures. After this Peter adds a few words to the husbands:

Verse 7:

7 You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered.

Peter begins the sentence by telling the husbands "in the same way." By this he means that a husband is to treat his wife with the same general respect and gentleness as a wife should show to her husband. He furthermore goes on to say to live with her in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman. Until just recently this would've been a relatively simple understandable statement. But today, at least in the news media and the movies, women are portrayed as being just as tough as men. It's common to see a movie where a 120 pound woman beats up a 220 pound man and tosses him around like a stuffed animal. While I have no doubt that there may be some well-trained female martial artists, nevertheless this is entirely Hollywood fiction, and I hope you ladies know that.

And men, I hope you know that also, as the Scriptures here reaffirm. For our wives to treat us in the manner that the Scriptures prescribe, and the manner that we desire, it is imperative that we treat them gently and in an understanding way, realizing that they are a weaker vessel physically and often emotionally. Peter says to treat them understandingly, which means we are to endeavor to understand how women think, and how they feel, and fashion our behaviors and actions accordingly.

Women, by their nature, are prone to react emotionally, where men ordinarily are prone to react logically. Of course there are exceptions, but this is the general rule. Therefore a man must understand his wife's point of view and give it consideration when making family decisions. But the man is charged with the responsibility of gently and understandingly leading the family in a lifestyle that honors God and conforms to his commands. All too often the men of today are either too cowardly or too lazy to accept that responsibility, and they either delegate it, or let it fall by default to the women, because they themselves aren't willing to pursue godliness in their own lives, so how can they lead their families in godliness?

Now, this verse, in similar manner to the prior verse, ends with a slightly difficult phrase. It ends with the words “so that your prayers will not be hindered.” It’s not immediately clear in just what manner Peter is referring. Is he talking about a specific prayer, or just prayers in general? And hindered in what way, in the ability to pray, or in the likelihood of their being answered?

And again, as usual, there’s differing viewpoints on this. Some contend that this is regarding a husbands specific prayers for the salvation of his wife. But this isn’t likely to be the meaning of this verse, because the words immediately preceding say “and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life.” A fellow heir of the grace of life, in the context of this verse, must be interpreted as a fellow Christian, it can’t logically mean anything else, so this verse simply cannot be speaking in that regard. If I may again refer to the comments of John Calvin, he takes a broader perspective, and suggests that the hindering of the prayers, as referenced here in this verse, is referring to one’s general mindset and temperament, whereby a peaceful and duly respectful and understanding relationship within one’s own family and personal relationships will be conducive to faithful prayer. Strife, contention, disrespect, and failure of any members of a family to behave lovingly and understandingly one to another, and especially by the leader of the household, will indeed be a hindrance to one’s prayer life, and it seems likely to John Calvin, and to this humble preacher, that this is the intention that Peter has in this specific verse. Now, with this, lets move on to the next verses:

Verses 8-12:

8 To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; 9 not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing. 10 For, "The one who desires life, to love and see good days, must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit. 11 "He must turn away from evil and do good; he must seek peace and pursue it. 12 "For the eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous, and His ears attend to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."

1 Peter 3:8-12 (NASB)

Now starting in verse eight, Peter sums up what he has said from Chapter 2 verse 11 through chapter 3 verse 7, which we’ve titled “A Christian’s Responsibilities.” It’s not that he’s finished speaking of these responsibilities, he’s just summing up the ones that he’s spoken of so far. To capture the essence, Peter uses the words harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit, to describe the general character and attitude that is proper for those who claim the name of Jesus Christ. It’s easy enough to recognize that none of these are words that would describe the normal attitude of the natural unregenerate man, or woman. Maybe some people would fit some of them a little bit, but generally speaking, all of these are contrary to the natural man.

And verse nine goes on to make the difference even more stark. Peter says “not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead.” Now this is just not a normal human response. The mind that is set on the flesh will not react in this way. But a mind that is set on the Spirit is life and peace, said the apostle Paul in his epistle to the Romans (8:6) The good news is there will come a time when every true child of God will actually think this way quite naturally, but that is only after we have been perfected and removed from this body of flesh in which we are presently trapped. For the present, it is necessary that we actively pursue such a righteous character and testimony by the vigilant pursuit of righteousness, which we maintain through volitionally setting our minds on the things of the Spirit, and putting to death the deeds of the flesh that constantly war against us. (Rom 8:13)

Classic examples of this verse are recorded for us in the Scriptures, whereby the Lord Jesus Christ himself, when hanging on a cross, uttered the words “forgive them Father for they know not what they are doing.” And again by Stephen, the first dear brother ever martyred, who, with his dying breath declared “Father do not hold this sin to their charge.” It’s quite marvelous that the Scriptures give us these examples, especially because we might expect this kind of behavior from the Lord Jesus, we know He could do things we simply cannot, but we have Stephen, just a plain ordinary man, who, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, behaved in like manner as his Lord and Savior.

Now I freely acknowledge that this is not natural human behavior, but it is the behavior that is mandated by the holy Scriptures for every man and woman who wishes to be a true disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is an example of the cross that we must pick up ourselves everyday if we truly wish to follow Him. These verses are classic examples of

why we said in our last lesson that those who like to use the term “oh we’re simply resting on the finished work of Jesus Christ” don’t understand either the implications of what they’re saying, nor what that work of Jesus actually entailed.

For a true child of God, the work of Jesus on the cross was not a completion work but a commencement work. Certainly Jesus said “it is done” but He was speaking about **His** work not **ours**. He had completed His work of a perfectly righteous life and a substitutionary death, and yes His work was done, and He was about to enter into His rest and glorification, but it is only the commencement for those who follow after Him. For those who follow, we must also earn our rest. Not our salvation, our rest, our rewards, and our glorification. We do not simply sit and rest while waiting for glorification, that’s not only absurd but it’s found nowhere in Scriptures either. Paul told the Philippians to “work out” their salvation with fear and trembling, not to sit and rest upon it. (Repeat) The Scriptures don’t teach rest or reward without labor. I have never heard of an employer who will reward his employees who were resting on the job, just sitting and waiting for a paycheck, when they were supposed to be working. This is called laziness, and dishonesty, and earns no one any reward, but only a stern rebuke, or worse.

There is certainly great and magnificent promises, and marvelous rewards awaiting every true child of God, but if anyone thinks that our job, right here and right now, is to simply sit and wait for those promises and rewards to come upon us, then they are grossly ignorant of the Scriptures. Did the apostles just go back to their fishing boats and wait for the Lord’s second coming? Now I freely acknowledge that not all of us are called to be apostles, nor are we called to leave our jobs or homes or families, but we most certainly are called into active duty as a royal priesthood, and to visibly demonstrate, by our own lives and behaviors, the moral and virtuous excellencies of our God and Savior, which we do by living our lives in accordance to His commandments and His teachings. And as we have read in those verses, that is the “working out” of our salvation, by which we will be entitled to a coming time of rest, reward, and even glorification. We are called to follow Jesus, which Peter told us earlier was an example for us to follow in His steps, not to simply sit and rest upon what He has already done. This is flagrant antinomianism, which the scriptures everywhere condemn.

The general concept seems to be that one is either saved or not saved, and this is completely a forensic declaration with little or no subjective application. If one is thought to be saved then nothing else really matters very much, and one may simply sit and rest upon that confidence. Now, for one who truly is saved, there is some truth in this statement. But where the problem comes in, is that those who feel this way demonstrate an absence of the work of the Holy Spirit operating in their life, and they are resting upon a totally false assumption. Salvation is much more than a forensic decree, it is a new life, a regeneration of soul and spirit, a new heart attitude and affections that diligently seek after righteousness and obedience to Jesus Christ, and if these things are missing, as they clearly appear to be in the vast majority of professing Christianity, then so is authentic salvation. Why in the world are we so reluctant to openly declare this, when the scriptures are filled to overflowing with this teaching, and the ramifications are literally life or death?

Now, so that we don’t stray too far off the point of our verses, which is that Christians “*were called for the very purpose that they might inherit a blessing,*” (v.9) we have been discussing the corresponding mandatory duties and responsibilities that the scriptures describe as accompanying and preceding that blessing. We are afforded our salvation by the grace of God through His gift of saving faith, but we then “work out that salvation” by our faithful service and adherence to His commandments, which is how we qualify ourselves for that blessing and various rewards. (1Co 3:8, 14; 2Co 5:10; Heb 11:6; Rev 22:12)

Verse 10 says “*the one who desires life, to love and see good days, must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit.*” Do we notice the one little word in this sentence that makes it imperative? Do we take notice of the little word “must?” Peter is telling us that if we desire life, and love, and good days, then there is something that we absolutely must do, or not do, to qualify ourselves for such. And among those things are, we must keep our tongues from evil and our lips from speaking deceit. In other words we must not maliciously slander other people, either by insinuation or innuendo, we are not to make evil things the topic of our thoughts and discussions, and we are absolutely forbidden to openly lie about any people or events. This is not rocket science, this is common sense. We already know that malicious gossip and lies does not promote a peaceful and tranquil life, nor is it a suitable testimony for a servant of Jesus Christ.

Verse 11 goes on to say *“he must turn away from evil and do good; he must seek peace and pursue it.”* This simply carries on the thought from the previous verse, which says that not only do we keep ourselves from speaking evil and deception, but we must keep ourselves from practicing it in our behaviors as well. We must seek peace, which means we truly desire it, and pursue it, which means take active measures and means to conduct ourselves peaceably amongst our families and communities.

Contrary to the thoughts of many, there is no biblical mandate for Christians to be instigators or troublemakers, even when they feel that their cause is just. Neither are we insinuating that Christians are supposed to be silent in the face of evil. We are directed to speak the truth in love. (Eph 4:15) It is this very characteristic that distinguishes the gospel of Jesus Christ from all the pagan idols and Islam, that demand subservience at the business end of a sword. This is not the *modus operandi* of the Christian religion. It is the way of the world, it is the natural way of man, but it is not the way of God, at least not in this age and time. But it is interesting to note that in Revelation 19 we are told that the Lord returns to earth and literally slays about 200 million soldiers with what is metaphorically called the sword from His mouth. Which simply means His words.

So that we understand, we do not serve a God who is a wimp. We serve a God who has a specific plan. He has a specific predetermined timetable for all event's, and a reason for doing things the way that He does. His beloved Son was required to first come as a sacrificial lamb before He was permitted to return as the lion, and the conquering King. The Father didn't send His Son to fix the earth and eradicate injustices here upon it. This is a disposable earth, and even a disposable universe, and God is not trying to fix it. He has already predetermined its destruction. He created it to serve a temporary purpose in the preparation of His own elect children, who would be trained and prepared for their eventual eternal purpose while here upon this temporary planet. When all of the preparations have been completed this universe will be consumed by fire, and God will create a new heaven and new earth in which only righteousness dwells, all things will be new and holy and perfect and righteous, and sin will never again intrude upon it. (Rev 21:1-8, 26)

This is where Christians differ so obviously from unbelievers. We understand that our treasure is not, and cannot ever be, related to this time and this age and this earth. We do not expect to be triumphant in this age. We do not expect that we will convince the multitudes of unbelievers to repent of their sin's and begin to behave godly. We do not think that we will ever take our cities, or our countries, for Jesus, any more than Jesus thought that He would take His home town of Nazareth for Jesus. Like Noah, and Jeremiah, we will faithfully and unceasingly preach repentance and righteousness, and faith toward God, but the Lord has told us that the vast majority of the world is not going to listen to us, because it didn't listen Him, and even hated Him for His teachings. (Jn 15:18)

Now it may appear that I'm straying off topic with some of this, but I don't think so. You see we're discussing the broader topic of a Christian's responsibilities before God in the here and now, as regarding our attitudes and behaviors. It is the conforming of the children of God to the image of Christ (Rom 8:29) and the maturing of them to the measure of the fullness of the stature of Christ (Eph 4:13) that is the whole purpose of this temporary creation of a universe and a solar system by God. It is His chosen temporary training ground, His boot camp, or school campus if you will, and all of these attitudes and behaviors that we are studying from the word of God are the objective, that is the aim and final goal, of our creation, and election, and redemption, and regeneration, and transformation. I'm afraid that we see these attitudes and behaviors as little more than suggested guidelines for a good life, rather than vital and essential elements of conformity to Christlikeness, without which, none will ever enter the kingdom of God. (Mat 5:20)

We are not here to take over the earth, or to dominate the earth, or to transform the behaviors of the people's of this earth, or even to see how many people we can keep out of hell, we are here to be transformed into the likeness of Christ, and in so doing to demonstrate the moral and virtuous Excellencies of our God and Redeemer. For a soldier it's a training base, for a student it's a school campus, but for God's children it's planet earth, with its nations and governments and peoples and families that is designated for the carrying out of our training and education. It is right here that we either pass or we fail, we graduate or we flunk out, we get the diploma or get the boot. And for those seeking to follow Jesus, and be received by Him, the diploma is based upon our conformity to His image.

Now lest I frighten you, it is based more on the diligent pursuit than the percentage of achievement, because none will ever complete it on their own. (Phi 1:6) But the diligent pursuit is the seal of authenticity. It is the testimony of the Holy Spirit actively indwelling the hearts and minds of the elect. And Peter told us earlier in chapter 1, verse 2, that this sanctifying work of the Spirit is bringing all of God's elect into obedience to Jesus Christ. This is the work of God, wrought in the heart of man, through the agency of the Holy Spirit, it's not something optional or dispensable. The Holy Spirit doesn't lie down on the job, if the Holy Spirit is present then He is doing the work for which the Father has sent Him, which work is to bring the believers into obedience to Jesus Christ.

So we see that all of these things that we're studying concerning the behaviors and attitudes of Christians are not merely suggestive behaviors for self-improvement, or self-fulfillment, but are the authenticating fruits of the work of the Holy Spirit. They cannot be consistently missing if the Holy Spirit is truly present. Where the Holy Spirit is present, the fruits of the Spirit will be present also, it cannot possibly be otherwise.

Now this seems a perfect place to move into verse 12 which says *"For the eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous, and His ears attend to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."*

While the principle of this verse has application to both believers and unbelievers, it's the application to believers that I wish to discuss first. Peter was speaking to Christians regarding life and love and seeing good days. We know that the Scriptures were written primarily to believers not to unbelievers, so what does this verse say to believers?

Peter has just told us the formula for life and love and good days, which is to abstain from evil, to seek peace and actively pursue it, to turn away from evil and do good, which means to obey God. And now he tells us that the eyes of the Lord are towards those who do those things, and His ears attend to their prayers. But in the same sentence goes on to say that the face of the Lord is against those who do evil. Very simply put, Peter is saying that the Lord brings favor on those who practice righteousness, but His face is set against those who practice evil. Yes, if you are a Christian who is living in disobedience to God, and practicing what is evil in His sight, and flagrantly disobeying His Commandments, then you can forget about praying to God for His favor and blessing. Unless perhaps your prayer is for the strength to repent of your sin and return to obedience. Favor and blessing are directly connected to righteousness and obedience. For the unbeliever, righteous behavior is probably impossible, but for the believer it is both possible and mandatory, and forms the conduit for the flow of blessings from God.

It is surprising how many people who call themselves Christians, and yet are knowingly living in disobedience to His Commandments, are still, nevertheless, continually offering up prayers for His blessings. God's favor and His blessings are directly connected to our obedience to His Commandments and our righteous behaviors. So says the holy Scriptures. And, this was the whole basis of the Covenant of the Law established with Israel.

Let me give you a classic example. I'm constantly seeing automobiles driving around with bumper stickers on them saying "God Bless America." Now I love my country, and I understand the sentiment, but when I see this I cringe, because I ask myself just what it is for which we think we may seek His blessing; is it for our endorsement of abortion, or our legalization of homosexuality, or our outlawing of his Bible in our schools, or our prohibiting of prayers to him on government property, or our total denial of His existence in our news media and entertainment industry, or our flagrant immorality and lustful pornographic lifestyle; how long do I need to stretch this endless list of godlessness to make the point?

I cannot understand how anyone could have the audacity to even dare utter the words "God Bless America" when we are living in such flagrant unrighteousness and "in your face" disobedience to God. Nowhere in the limitless volumes of world literature could a better description of America be found than those words recorded by Paul in his epistle to the Romans, chapter 3, verses 10 through 18. And yet we stand unashamedly and ask Him for His blessing.

Now I understand that some will argue that it's not for these things that we ask for blessing, but for all the good things our country does. But that's not how it works. It's not a simple balance scale where we weigh the good versus the bad and see which is greater. For instance, is it okay for a serial killer to keep on killing if he does enough good deeds to outweigh the bad? Will we bestow a blessing on him for those good deeds while he keeps right on killing?

This is obviously absurd and we all understand it, we would immediately arrest him and put him in prison, regardless of how many nice things he did, because you simply can't go around killing people, it's against our laws. It is no different with God. He does not tolerate sinful disobedience because we balance it off with a few good deeds and acts of mercy. He has laws that He enforces and demands our compliance. And we will never be blessed while we're knowingly living in disobedience to His laws. It doesn't work that way.

There will be no blessings for America unless she repents of her sins and returns to righteousness; and sadly, I see no such trend emerging, in fact just the opposite. I see the acceptance and practice of evil proceeding from bad to even worse, and an utter rejection of godly righteousness in favor of pleasure and lust and greed and power, about which we were warned by Paul in his second epistle to Timothy, chapters 3 and 4.

And these same people who shamelessly ask for God's blessing in the very midst of their rebellious lifestyles, will stand with your arms stretched out, scratching their heads, and asking how in the world could a loving God be doing this to us, when He begins to pour out His fierce wrath and judgment in the time of tribulation. How rightly does the scriptures describe this group who, while seeing all these things, they still don't see, and while hearing the words with their ears, they just don't understand. (Mat 13:13) And multitudes of these very same one's, who never considered the commandments of God, and the practice of righteousness to be either binding or essential for the blessing of His kingdom, nevertheless truly believe themselves to actually be real Christians. (Mat 7:21-23)

Don't be deceived, it is those who actually practice righteousness who are righteous in the sight of God. And those who practice evil are of the Devil. So says the Apostle John (1Jn 3:7-8) So how do we wrap this up? What are these verses teaching us? They wouldn't be recorded in holy Scriptures if they weren't important in the eyes of God, so we need to recognize their importance and apply them accordingly.

These verses that we've been examining in this series deal with relationships. Relationships with atheists and pagans, relationships with governing authorities, relationships with community, and relationships within our own families. Every facet of the Christian life has been painstakingly recorded by God *for the building up of the body of Christ 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.* (Eph 4:12-13) So, we'll continue to study through these verses, because we know that all of them are part of our Christian maturity process, whereby we are being prepared to take our place by His side in His eternal kingdom. To Him be the glory forever and ever amen.

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08/08/10