

1st Peter 2:11-25

Righteous Living

That we...should live unto righteousness – v. 24

Doctrine and Duty – the two things go hand in hand. You find that formula in a number of places. Our shorter catechism is divided along those lines. The first 38 questions pertain to doctrine and when you come to question #39 you read: *What is the duty which God requireth of man? Ans: The duty which God requireth of man, is obedience to his revealed will.* And in the questions that follow you're led into the Christian's duty to keep the 10 commandments and you're led into your duty of faith and repentance and the use of the means of grace and then you're led into your duty to pray.

A number of commentators and preachers recognize Peter's first epistle being divided that way also. From 1:1-2:10 you find an emphasis on doctrine. And then beginning in 2:11 and running through to the end of the book you find an emphasis on duty. When Dr. Cairns preached through this book many years ago he divided it into these two major sections. I can still remember him emphasizing The Christians' Fundamental Doctrine and the Christian's Fundamental Duty.

We generally think of Paul's epistles divided that way don't we? The first 11 chapters of Romans set before us the most systematized exposition of the doctrines of the gospel and from chp. 12 through to chp. 16 you find a emphasis on the Christian's duty in the light of the doctrines of the gospel.

It's obviously not a hard and fast distinction. When you read through Paul's epistles and Peter's 1st epistle you can find duty or practice woven in to the doctrine and occurring during the sections on doctrine – just like you can find doctrine woven in to the section on duty. So the division is real but it's not absolute.

I've said on occasion in the course of our studies in 1st Peter that there are instances in which Peter will remind you of Paul. That's especially true in the beginning of chp. 1. When Peter speaks of being elect according to the foreknowledge of God through sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus it reminds me of Paul in Romans 8 where he speaks of being predestinated and called and then justified and then glorified.

And when Peter writes in 1:3 *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,* – I'm reminded of Ephesians where Paul writes *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.*

Interestingly enough though, I have to say that when you come to the section of chp. 2 that we've read from just now I see some very close resemblance between Peter and James. If you're familiar with James epistle then you know what an emphasis he places on faith being accompanied with works.

- Jas 2:14 *What [doth it] profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?*
- Jas 2:17 *Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.*
- Jas 2:18 *Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.*

This last verse in particular provides perhaps the best analysis of the verses we've read from 1st Peter 2. Notice the emphasis in these verses on good works and *well doing*.

Verse 12: *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.*

Verse 15: *For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men:*

Verse 20: *For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God.*

And these verses contain the general statements. You can break them down into more specific instances of well doing or doing well as you work your way through the verses also as we'll see in the course of our study today. Now whenever I come to a section of Scripture that contains exhortations of various kinds for various circumstances, the thing I search for is to see whether or not there might be a sentence or a phrase – a verse or a part of a verse that encompasses all the various exhortations.

And in this case I think I have such a statement in v. 24. The verse begins by making reference to Christ *Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree*, but then Peter shifts his focus back to the Christian and in so doing he states the purpose for which Christ bore our sins in His body on the tree. Look at it again: *Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.*

Living unto righteousness – doesn't that encompass the various exhortations we find in this section of 1st Peter? What they all amount to is living unto righteousness. Abstaining from fleshly lusts; having your conversation honest among the Gentiles; submitting to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake; I love the way he piles up these exhortations in v. 18: *Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king.*

All of these things together amount to living unto righteousness. And so that's what I want to make our focal point this morning – this practice or duty of living unto righteousness. Simply put:

The Christian Must Live Unto Righteousness

And in the moments that remain I want to analyze this theme of righteous living. Let's think first on:

I. The Characteristics of Righteous Living

If you would live unto righteousness then there's a very real sense in which your life should be characterized as a life of abstinence. Look at v. 11 *Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul*. The world will indulge in any number of things that you're not to indulge in.

In a culture of hedonism where man's chief end is to eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow he dies – the Christian is to abstain from fleshly lusts. His life is to be one of self control rather than indulgence. And Peter gives the very reason for this in the same verse where he gives the admonition. Notice who he addresses this admonition to – *Dearly beloved* he writes in the beginning of the verse. And you could certainly draw the application from this direct address that not only were these scattered Christians beloved of Peter but they were and are beloved of Christ.

He came for them; He lived for them; He died and rose for them. He loved them all the way to Calvary's cross. And because you are chosen of Him and His love toward you is steadfast and sure, your status in this world has changed. You are now a *stranger and pilgrim* in this world. You see beyond it. You are not of it. Your real citizenship is in heaven.

The other side of the equation, you could say, is holiness. Do you remember the command to be holy back in 1:15? Listen to what precedes that command in 1:14 *As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: 15 But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation*. A holy life is a separated life, especially is it to be separated from former lusts.

In Peter's 2nd epistle he addresses the issue of lusts also in the first chapter of that epistle. And in the 4th verse of chp. 1 of that epistle he explains something about fleshly lusts. Listen to 2Pet. 1:4 *Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust*. Corruption in this world comes through lust – i.e. there are many legitimate things in this world that the Christian can partake of and enjoy. It really amounts to a matter of balance. It's when these practices get out of balance or go out of bounds for their legitimate use that they become corrupted through lust.

Eating and drinking are legitimate activities – drunkenness and gluttony are not. Physical intimacy is a legitimate pleasure in marriage – fornication and adultery and pornography are not. Recreation and sports activity and entertainment can have their place. Being consumed by them has no place. So if you would live unto righteousness then you must live a life of abstinence where fleshly lusts are concerned. May God help us all to be strangers to the kind of hedonism and idolatry that grips the world.

But not only is righteous living characterized by abstinence but it's also characterized by submission. *Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake* Peter writes in v. 13. And then he breaks it down – submission to civil authorities – vv. 13-17; submission of slaves to their masters – vv. 18-25, even to the unjust and harsh ones. He carries this idea then into the next chapter which includes wives submitting to their husbands 3:1ff.

I listened to a sermon in which the preacher made an interesting observation about Peter's audience. This preacher pointed out that most of the Christians Peter would be addressing would in all likelihood fall under the category of slaves. That would certainly be consistent with Paul's letter to the Corinthians in which he writes in 1:26ff *For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: 27 But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty.*

Now I should note under this point that it is with regard to the Christian's submission in particular that Peter cites the example of Christ and refers to the unjust and unfair treatment of Christ. 2:22,23: *For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: 22 Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: 23 Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.*

Here is submission at its best – being committed to God, waiting for God to deal with the unjust and unfair treatment we receive. Some Christians, I'm afraid, have wrong notions about their submission. The world, you see, despises the very notion of submission. The only submission the inhabitants of the world believe in is submission to them. The world should revolve around me and should submit to my every whim and wish.

Submission is regarded by the world as being a form of servile slavery and yet would you notice that Peter doesn't treat it that way when he says in v. 16 with regard to submission to civil authorities that we're to do this *As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God.* What kind of freedom is this, you might well ask, that calls for such submission? It's the freedom that Christ provides. It's freedom from sin's condemnation and sin's dominion. It's the freedom that comes in being accepted by God through Christ. It's the freedom that makes you a servant of God.

There is no such thing, you see, as the kind of absolute freedom that the world deceives itself into thinking it has. You were created to be a servant of God and you were redeemed to be a servant of God when men lost the privilege of being God's servants and became servants instead to the devil. Isn't it interesting to contemplate how the devil deceives his subjects into thinking they're free when in fact they're slaves to corruption? And the freedom found in Christ is the freedom of happy servitude to God?

So living unto righteousness requires abstinence and it requires submission. It also requires respect. That's v. 17 in a nutshell *Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king.* R.C. Sproul adds an interesting note on *honour* in his sermon on this section of 1st Peter. He writes how long ago *General Douglas MacArthur said in a speech 'Duty, honor, country: those three hallowed words reverently dictate what you ought to be, what you can be, what you will be.'* Sproul then goes on to write: *Nevertheless, the word 'honor' has all but disappeared from our vocabulary; it belongs to a former era. However, if you look up the word 'honor' in a Bible concordance, you may be surprised how frequently the word is used, even in the Ten Commandments: 'Honor your father and your mother' (Exod. 20:12). Honor goes beyond respect; to honor is to bend over backwards to show respect for other people.*

These are some of the characteristics, then, of righteous living. I haven't given you an exhausted list at all. I should perhaps at least mention one other characteristic that I've already touched upon by citing the verses on well doing and that's initiative. Taking the initiative to do well – not merely doing what you're told or what's expected but stepping up yourself and figuring out yourself how to take the matter in hand and do what you know is right before you're told by someone to do it.

So you have then these characteristics of righteous living. The question that might naturally arise might be – *why do we find it so hard? Why are these exhortations even necessary? Shouldn't these matters be such common sense issues that Peter shouldn't even have to waste ink and paper in setting them forth?* And that question brings us to our next point of analysis. We've seen the characteristics of righteous living. Let's think next on:

II. The Challenge of Righteous Living

As simple and practical as you might find these exhortations, don't you know that they're not always so easy to heed? As Christians we face challenges which include difficulties and defeats and setbacks. Progress seems so slow at times as to be undetectable and how many times do you feel that for every step you manage to take forward you take two steps back?

The thing you know, but I bring to your attention anyway, is that when it comes to living unto righteousness, you're in a spiritual war. Again note the words of v. 11 *Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.*

The word *war* depicts a military campaign. It brings James 4:1 to mind: *From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?*

Here is the battle against your flesh. Paul describes this war in Gal. 5:17 *For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.* Add to this the hostility of the world toward Christ and toward Christians. In the very next verse in 1Pet. 2:12 Peter

references the Gentiles *who speak against you as evildoers*. And a little further down in v. 19 *For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully*.

You certainly get the picture throughout this section of 1st Peter that the Christian is not living in a friendly environment when it comes to the matter of living unto righteousness. There are forces within and there are forces without that resist your effort to live right at every turn. It's not an easy thing. There is a war to be waged. And these things don't come naturally, they come spiritually.

Such was the force of the conflict in Paul's life that by the time you get to the end of Romans 7 following his lament that he finds himself doing the things that he knows he shouldn't do and he finds himself failing to do the things that he knows he should do – it's as if he cries out in anguish in v. 24 *O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?*

I've heard preachers expound on the phrase *the body of this death* by explaining how in the days of ancient Rome when a murderer would be sentenced to death, the way that penalty would be carried out would be for the victim's body to be tied and fastened to the murderer's body so that the weight and decay of the dead body would eventually overcome and feed on the murderer's body.

What a vivid picture, therefore, of the weight and resistance that the Christian meets with when he strives for righteous living. There is resistance. There is a weight to be borne; there is a battle to fight; there are forces that have to be overcome in order to live unto righteousness. And even though you know this in your experience, it's good to be reminded from God's word so that you don't count your warfare and your struggles to be strange things.

You should find it comforting, therefore, that the struggle you're engaged in is a part of your Christian life. If I could borrow a phrase from Peter that we'll come to later when we get to chp. 4. In 4:12 he writes *Beloved, think in not strange*. Your warfare may seem long and heavy and it may bring with it more setbacks than you care to count – *Beloved, think it not strange*. And in 5:9 writing with reference to the devil and the part he has in our spiritual warfare Peter says *Whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world*.

Your battle may be long and intense and difficult to bear, but don't ever think that it's unique. In every place and in every time period from the days of Peter to the present hour such warfare has been taking place in the lives of Christians. Knowing that your struggle is a common one should bring you some consolation therefore. But God and Christ would give you more than merely the consolation of a common struggle. And this leads to my next and final point. We've seen the characteristics of righteous living as well as the challenge to righteous living. Let's think now on:

III. The Motivation for Righteous Living

That motivation comes by looking back, by looking at the present, and by looking at the future. Look at the words of v. 25 *For ye were as sheep going astray*. This is your look back. It describes what you were. *You were as sheep going astray*. You were lost, in other words. You were gone astray from God Himself. Peter is drawing from Isaiah 53:6 and that verse adds something to the condition of sinful man that Peter doesn't quote. *All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way*.

There's the explanation for going astray and being wayward from God. It's traceable to having your own way – living for self in other words. You wouldn't have Christ rule over you because you would rule over yourself. This is still a propensity that believers have to fight. There are many, you know, that would profess to be Christians. They certainly desire salvation but they have the mistaken notion that they can have Christ on their own terms. They can turn to their own way and have Christ too which is just another way of saying they can have their sin and have Christ too.

This is what you were. But as v. 24 points out (also drawing from Isa. 53) *you were healed*. You were healed by His stripes. Isa. 53:5 *But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed*. Sin, you know, is likened to a disease. It's a disease that effects the way you think and the way you act. It's a disease that effects your attitude. It's a disease that infects every part of man. And you were healed from the disease of sin. You gained a new outlook on life and on eternity. You gained the assurance of God's acceptance through Christ.

And this is what motivates you to live unto righteousness. You see yourself as a debtor to Christ. It's a debt you'll never be able to completely pay but God is pleased to accept payment, so to speak, by your living unto righteousness. So this is what you were. I've already touched upon what you are now – you're healed now.

But look at the way v. 25 puts it *For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls*. You've come back to God through Christ. Just as the prodigal ventured into the far country to sow his wild oats until at last he came to himself so have you come to yourself and in coming to yourself you've also come back into the fold of God. Most gladly do you say with the Psalmist *The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want*.

And because the Lord is your Shepherd – you will abstain from fleshly lusts and you will submit to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake and you will honor all men, love the brotherhood, fear God and honor the king. You will devote yourself to well doing and to good works. You're aware of the high price that was paid to redeem you. Your heart is stirred and should be stirred every time you read the words of v. 24 *Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree*.

And would you notice something else in v. 24 that describes what you are now. I really like the AV reading for this statement and the AV is the only version that translates it this way - *that we, being dead to sins*. Most other versions translate it *that we might die to sin*.

Both ideas are legitimate concepts but I like the AV translation because it captures what we are positionally. Positionally we are dead to sins. Paul brings this out in Romans 6:11, a verse I often refer to as the essence of gospel obedience that describes for us the obedience of faith. Listen to what Paul writes and see the agreement once again between him and Peter when he writes *Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

This reckoning process is a process of faith. You are count this to be so. You don't make believe that it's so – no, you count it to be so and you count it that way with a good basis. You are dead to sin because Christ died to sin once and you are joined to Him. And you count yourself to be alive unto God because Christ ever lives unto God and you are joined to Him.

So this is what you are now – you're healed from sin – you're delivered from sin's dominion – you're dead to sin. And you've returned to the Shepherd and Bishop of your soul. Do you not find yourself motivated by these timely and costly gospel truths to want to live unto righteousness? Oh how I would that the Holy Spirit would so inflame your heart with the truth of Christ in such a way that like the Psalmist you'd find yourself able to run through a troop and leap over a wall (Ps. 18:29).

There's one more motivating factor in our text and with this we'll close. You've looked back to see what you were. You've looked at the present to see what you are now. There is also a forward look that contributes to our motivation to live unto righteousness. Look at the words of v. 12 *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.*

The day of visitation makes reference to this world being visited by God Himself. When Christ foretold the destruction of Jerusalem in Lk. 19:44 He said with reference to the Roman armies that would invade the city: *And shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation.*

This world has been visited by God Himself – God come in the flesh. The next time of visitation looks ahead to a day of judgment. And Peter calls on his readers to keep that time of visitation in view and draw from that coming day the motivation to have your conversation honest among the Gentiles, in spite of what they think or say about you, in spite of how they treat you. Make sure you live unto righteousness that on that coming day you'll be vindicated and Christ will be glorified.

So we have every reason to live unto righteousness. When you consider what you were and what you are and what's to come you have good reason to heed the exhortations. And when you consider who Christ is and what Christ has done for you your motivation should be strengthened all the more.

So abstain from fleshly lusts, and submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake – honor all men, love the brotherhood, fear God, and honor the king.