

“Good Christians Make Good Citizens”

I Peter 2:11-17

Preached by Dr. Robert F. Browning, Pastor
Smoke Rise Baptist Church
Stone Mountain, Georgia
June 29, 2003

The most recent Gallup Poll is not flattering or encouraging. Seventy-seven percent of Americans rated morality in America as poor. As a matter of fact, the ethical and moral condition of our country rated as high as the threat of terrorism on the list of concerns that Americans have. The scandals that have rocked corporate boardrooms, Wall Street, accounting firms, the Catholic Church and even major league baseball have frightened and disillusioned many of our citizens. I would be willing to say that everyone in the sanctuary today shares this concern.

What should be our response to this dilemma? Is there a word from the Lord for us as we prepare to celebrate the two hundred twenty-seventh anniversary of the birth of our nation? Definitely, and one place where He has spoken is in I Peter 2:11-17. It is in this passage that Peter reminded his readers of their civic responsibilities before God and man. Let's look at them.

Peter began by reminding his readers that this world was not their home. *“Dear friends, I urge you as **aliens and strangers** in the world, to abstain from sinful desires which war against your soul”* I Peter 2:11. Before talking to his audience about their civic responsibilities, Peter reminded them of their relationship to this world. It was not their home because they were on a pilgrimage that would not end here. Instead, their journey would end in the presence of God on the other side of death. Heaven was their home and they were to do nothing that would prevent them from making it home or get too attached to the things of this world so that they would not want to leave it.

We need to be reminded of this as well. Keeping life in perspective and recognizing that we are on a pilgrimage to our eternal home can help us make wise and responsible decisions. It can certainly help us arrange our priorities in their proper order.

I have always appreciated Soren Kierkegaard's definition of success. He wrote, “Success is to be rightly related to eternity.” All decisions should be made with eternity in mind. We need to see the consequences of our decisions even beyond this world, for this world is not our home.

On the other hand, this world is important. Why else would Peter give careful instructions about how believers were to live in this world? Being an alien did not give the early Christians a license to be irresponsible and undisciplined. It doesn't us, either.

What did Peter tell them they were to do? He told them to be good people, respect authority and use their freedom wisely.

Peter had a two-fold definition of what it meant to be **good**. A good person was an individual that refused to do things that were harmful but rather did things that were healthy and wholesome. Being good was a combination of resisting temptation and accepting challenges.

*“Dear friends, I urge you as **aliens and strangers** in the world **to abstain from sinful desires** which war against your soul. **Live such good lives** among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us”* I Peter 2:11-12.

Sometimes Christians are known by what they don't do as much as what they do. A faithful follower of Jesus will not deceive others, hold grudges, seek revenge, be greedy, discriminate against others or engage in immoral activities.

Instead, a Christian will live such an attractive and lovely life that it inspires others and motivates them to be better people. This was what Peter had in mind when he challenged his readers to live “good” lives.

Peter then encouraged his readers to **respect authority**, especially those that had been sent to keep law and order. You cannot help but notice in this passage that Peter did not condemn

or condone a particular form of government. Rather, he endorsed order over chaos so that the Kingdom of God could grow in the hearts and lives of people.

“Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the kings as the supreme authority or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God’s will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men” I Peter 2:13-15.

Finally, Peter challenged his readers to **use their freedom in Christ wisely**. They had not been set free by Jesus to do anything they wanted to do but to do God’s will. They were free to follow Him.

“Live as free men but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil. Live as servants of God. Show proper respect to everyone. Love the brotherhood of believers. Fear God. Honor the king” I Peter 2:16-17.

What impresses you when you read this passage? I’ll tell you what it is for me. I am overwhelmed by Peter’s insistence that the early Christians be good role models under adverse circumstances. His readers lived in a totalitarian state. They had little if any voice in the decisions of their government. At times, they were falsely accused of committing crimes. In spite of this, Peter encouraged them to do what was right and abstain from doing wrong. And the temptation to do wrong, to fight fire with fire, had to be so strong. Yet, Peter encouraged them not to give in to it. Instead, they were to obey the law, show respect for all people, even the king, revere God and love one another. Why? He wanted his readers to reflect the goodness of God and show people the best way to live.

Last Christmas, I received Kent M. Keith’s book, *Anyway*. As a student at Harvard in the 1960s, Keith articulated ten principles for living well and being happy that he referred to as **“The Paradoxical Commandments.”** After learning that Mother Teresa taped these principles to the walls of her children’s home in Calcutta, he decided to publish them and the stories that bring them to life. It is Keith’s premise that we need to face the worst in our world with the best in ourselves. Let me share the **ten principles** with you.

People are illogical, unreasonable and self-centered. Love them anyway.

If you do good, people will accuse you of selfish and ulterior motives. Do good anyway.

If you are successful, you will win false friends and true enemies. Succeed anyway.

The good you do today will be forgotten tomorrow. Do good anyway.

Honesty and frankness make you vulnerable. Be honest and frank anyway.

The biggest men and women with the biggest ideas can be shot down by the smallest men and women with the smallest minds. Think big anyway.

People favor underdogs but follow only top dogs. Fight for a few underdogs anyway.

What you spend years building may be destroyed overnight. Build anyway.

People really need help but may attack you if you do help them. Help them anyway.

Give the world the best you have and you’ll get kicked in the teeth. Give the world the best you have anyway.

I think Keith has captured the essence of what Peter was writing to his readers. All of us need to honor God and reflect His goodness through our lifestyle, relationships and business dealings. We need to “live as free men...and servants of God,” even if others do not. Doing so will strengthen the land we are passing through and allow God to say, “Well done, good and faithful servant” when we arrive home.