

What Is An Honourable Life? When We Suffer for Living Well

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 16 June 2024

Preacher: Rev Gordon Kennedy

[0 : 00] Let's share our prayer together. Heavenly Father, we humbly bow in your presence. May your word be our rule, your spirit, our teacher, and your great glory, our supreme concern.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. One of the things we do wrong is to divide up our lives between the sacred and the secular.

We imagine that there is a religious part of our life and there is a non-religious part of our life. Our contemporary culture encourages this. We are told in a thousand messages that you can have as much religion as you like as long as you keep it to yourself.

Religion is a private matter. It should not in any way affect your work, your family, your entertainment, what you spend your money on, what you watch on the TV, how you talk to your friends and people you work with.

As long as it doesn't affect your life in any way, you can have as much religion as you like. Eugene Peterson, who translated the Bible into the message version, was for 30 years or so minister in a church in Maryland in the United States.

[1 : 43] And he writes of being at the door of the church one Sunday morning after the service. And this man who was regularly in church, a businessman, came to the door, shook his hand and said, Well, pastor, that's great, but now it's time to get back to the real world.

Trouble is, we buy that message. We imagine that what happens in these four walls is somehow divorced, separated from what happens out there.

It isn't. There is no possibility that God created the world so that we could worship him here and have a completely separate existence out there.

There is no divide between the sacred and the secular. All of our life as disciples of Jesus is holy. All of our lives. All of our lives as disciples of Jesus is designed by God to be lived on public display.

[2 : 57] We are God's visual aid. If some non-Christian person were in some way to cry out to God and say, Show me what it means to be a disciple of Jesus, God would point to you and say, Look at them.

We do not only live as disciples here, but out there, where other people can see us and notice how we live.

Integrity is about being the same on the outside as you are on the inside. It is about being the same person.

Whether you are at work, at the golf club, in Tesco's, on the bus, driving your car, in church, at the prayer meeting, or at some other religious activity.

An honorable life, a good life, is integrated. It is the same life wherever you live it.

[4 : 13] This is what Peter is writing to the church about in these verses in the middle of his letter. He's writing to encourage Christian people to be the same outside the church as they are inside the church.

To be godly people when they gather together for worship and prayer and to be the same godly people when they are scattered at their work or their entertainment or in their families, wherever they are, outside.

So don't panic. The rest of chapter 2 from verse 11 and the whole of chapter 3 is all about this theme. But you'll have noticed that Norma didn't read all those verses.

What Peter does is give us a series of examples. If you're at work, if you're at your family, if you're in the public square, wherever you are, here's an example.

And the idea is that we take the example and we then replicate the example in all of the circumstances and all of the situations of our lives, many of which Peter could not have imagined. [5 : 34] Peter could not have imagined needing to write about godly living while watching the TV because they didn't have TVs. It hadn't even been imagined.

But we need to learn how to apply the principles of godly living everywhere to all the circumstances in our lives.

This is what Peter's writing about. There's a general pattern. You need to lay down before you can pick up.

You need to take off the gardening clothes before you put on your party clothes. We need to abstain from before we can take up.

And we need to keep on being the people God has made us to be. Peter writes about abstaining from the passions of the flesh.

[6 : 37] We are not to deny passion. Passion is a good thing. It is good to be passionate about good things. We should have a deep zeal for justice, for peacemaking, for loving your neighbor.

These things should set a fire within us that we long to do them ourselves and see them done not only in our community but in every community.

But there are some passions which war against us, which would destroy us. This is a serious business. Not everything that goes by the name of love is love.

Not every passion that sweeps through our emotional system is a good passion. This advice, it turns out, is not uniquely Christian.

Many ethicists over many centuries have written about the need to train our behavior. to be passionate about good things and to abstain from being passionate about bad things and to recognize the difference between the two.

[8 : 04] An honorable life is one which is not allowed to run amok. We are not out of control. We are not slaves to our passions.

We are not governed by our emotions or our feelings. An honorable life makes choices.

I will choose to be passionate about justice, but I will not be passionate about selfishness or spreading gossip. more positively, Peter writes, we are to keep on with good living, with honorable conduct, especially in the sight of the Gentiles, especially before our non-Christian neighbors and friends.

don't you find it embarrassing when you finally pick up the courage to speak to that non-Christian friend and say to them, we're having a carol service in December, why not come along?

Or we're having a concert in July, come along to the church, meet some folks there. Don't you find it embarrassing when that person starts to tell you, I'm not coming to your church because I know a Christian in my workplace who's pilfering office supplies or swindling their expenses.

[9 : 38] I know a Christian in the golf club who flies into a rage and throws their clubs about the green and bangs and stamps. And if that's what your Christian life's like, I don't want anything to do with it.

Don't you find that embarrassing when that happens? Whether you like it or not, your non-Christian neighbors and friends are watching you.

They are watching you to see what difference it makes when you claim to be Christian. When you tell them that you went to church on Sunday, they are looking at what you do to see what difference it made.

They notice our behavior and they especially notice when it's not honorable. And so Peter writes, keep on being good.

Keep on living an honorable life all the time. You are always on display. You are never not on display. Someone is always watching.

[10 : 50] Live a good life. Peter reminds us that our good living, our honorable conduct, results in God being glorified in the world.

We are not ever encouraged anywhere in Scripture to live good lives so that we might earn something from God. You cannot earn what God has already given you.

He has already given you forgiveness in the cross of Jesus. He has already given you new life in the resurrection of Jesus. He has already given you His grace as He opened His hand and poured it out upon you.

You can't earn what God has already given you. That's not why we live good lives. But living transformed lives, we command God before all creation. We bring God glory before our neighbors and our friends. That's why Peter takes so much time in the middle of this short letter to write about this urgent subject.

[12 : 04] We need to learn how to live godly lives so that the people out there will get to know God in a good way. and will glorify him.

So, the short passage in chapter two, which Norma read, is about living as good citizens in the community. I did not know the date when the election was going to be called, when six months ago we planned this passage in 1 Peter for this time.

but it's actually all about how we live in the public community and engage with the public community just as Norma was praying.

we have been set free in the gospel but not to do as we please. We have been set free to serve others.

We have been set free from chains of sin so that we can bless our neighbors and our friends as we live good lives before them.

[13 : 15] our culture prizes individual freedom above all else. The common good today must submit to individual freedom.

We are destroying community lives by our selfishness. The gospel calls us to be counter cultural to prize the common good above our own desires and our own wishes.

I will in Christ use my freedom to serve and bless others. And Peter directly applies this in relation to the civil authorities.

He writes about serving the governor, honoring those in authority. Paul writes the same thing. Peter wrote this in a time of persecution.

Paul was executed by the authorities. Peter will be executed by the authorities. Many Christians were killed, put out of their homes, their work, refused fellowship with their neighbors and friends.

[14 : 36] Peter is not writing from some modern liberal state where freedom of religion is practiced. But still he writes we should be concerned for the common good and respect authority and honor those who serve our community.

As citizens of a kingdom, members of a community, we have a responsibility to those in authority in that kingdom. and Peter is writing that our honorable life means that we are to be good citizens of that community.

We will pay our taxes. We will do our duty to the state. We will engage in public and civic life. Yes, Peter knows well that to confess Jesus is Lord is to stand over against the state which confesses that it is Lord.

But it's not Lord. Jesus is Lord. Our submission to the state cannot result in our denying the gospel. But up to that point, Peter writes, we are to live as good citizens.

This is the will of God. We are to do good in our community to silence the ignorance of foolish people. And I think this cuts two different ways.

[16 : 01] There are some who in public debate and in public discourse accuse Christians of bad living, of being unhelpful members of the community.

And we are to have ready at hand examples from our way of living to prove this to be a lie. At a previous election, I was at a hustings in the city here, and there was a government minister responsible for justice on the platform.

And some people from the atheist society asked the question, why are you victimizing prisoners in our prisons by allowing Christian chaplains to go and work with them in prison?

Thank God for that justice minister who stood up and said, if anyone else in the community would do as good work in our prisons as these chaplains, I'll gladly have them in.

And he bore testimony to chaplains supporting prisoners who were depressed and had mental health issues, supporting prisoners' families who were separated from their family because of crime, of creating communities and prisons that helped reduce tension and diminish violence.

[17 : 20] He was able to give testimony to the good life of Christians. And we should be able to do the same. When someone says that the church is not helpful in community, we should be able to take up our examples and say, well, we're feeding the hungry folks in our community by supporting the food bank.

We're caring for strangers and aliens who come to our community by partnering with the city mission and their work amongst refugees. And a dozen other examples of things we are doing that make a difference in our community.

That's what Peter means. But then there's the example of Daniel. Daniel was stolen from his home by an aggressive government who destroyed the city of Jerusalem, burnt the temple, destroyed all possibility of worship for Daniel and his friends.

And Daniel was dragged away to a foreign nation. And then Daniel was told, come and serve in the state. Come and learn our customs and become a high officer in the government in our city and our nation.

And Daniel said, okay, I'll do that. He ended up serving the government that persecuted himself and his family. Because God wants good people to serve in government.

[18 : 50] Because he knows that that will bless the whole community. It's not good to have less able people serving when there are good people who can serve.

the Bible doesn't call us to make the state Christian or to have the church as the church run the government. The Church of Scotland has enough trouble running the Church of Scotland without trying to run the country.

That's not the point. I think Peter is saying as individual Christians, you have lots of opportunities to serve for good in our community.

Go and do it. Get involved. Be a blessing. Prize and be zealous for the common good.

church. At a time of general election, we should be serving in our community by engaging with the political process. Here's a thought.

[20 : 02] I am prepared to guarantee that this week you're going to have something like this conversation. You're going to meet a non-Christian friend and one of you is going to say, what about this election?

And what if your non-Christian friend would say, yeah, they're a shower. Can't trust any of them.

They're all liars and cheats. They only say what they want until they get your vote. Have you heard that sentence? And you say, yeah, that's right.

Here's what you're going to say this week. That's why I'm praying for them. That they would start to live different lives.

So that we would have honourable leaders in our community. Imagine you said that. What a difference that would make to the conversation.

And your friend would at least see that you're thinking, I'm not just going to join in the gossiping and complaining, I'm trying to do something to help and make the situation better.

[21 : 07] Don't you think that would be a blessing? Don't you think that would be a blessing? over in chapter 3, we jumped on to chapter 3, Peter writes about living a virtuous life.

Being sympathetic, sharing in sorrow and suffering with those who are sorrowing and suffering. Do you know when Christians started doing this at the end of the first century and into the second century AD, it was so unusual.

There are still letters existing today from governors and officers of the state wondering what are these crazy Christians doing? Caring for people who are sorrowing and suffering when nobody else does.

Showing family love to other Christians, living with a soft, tender heart, feeling concern with which expresses itself in action.

Lots of people in our community watch the news and they say, oh, that's a shame, what's happening in Gaza. And we have to say that as well, but our soft, tender heart is to drive us to actually do something about it, to pray, to write to our MP, to find out where we can be involved in making a difference in these situations.

[22 : 35] have a humble mind. This is entirely counter-cultural. In the Greek culture, the highest virtue you could have was honour, to have people notice you and talk about you with respect and remember you after you were dead.

And the Christian gospel turns that right upside down. It doesn't matter if anyone knows your name. It doesn't matter if anyone remembers you. Be humble in your service of others.

Peter writes down a golden rule, verse 9, do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on contrary, bless, for to this you were called, so that you may obtain a blessing.

Now if you do this, you're going to suffer. People will take advantage of you. I would rather be taken advantage of for living like this than to live with hardened cynicism.

It's a better way to live. If enough people in the community were to live like this, not replying to evil with evil or not reviling for reviling, if enough of us were to do this, we would eventually tip over and transform the whole community.

[24 : 00] Wouldn't that be a blessing for everyone? In verse 13, Peter writes, now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good?

And we might think the answer is no one, but actually in our community, you try and do good, someone's going to oppose you. Verse 14, even if you suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed, reminds us of the beatitude of Jesus and the Sermon on the Mount.

We know that if we live a good life, we will suffer for it. Jesus said it, Peter writes it down for us, but we also know that there is a blessing for us in this.

This is the good life that we are called to live. Suffering of this kind gives us opportunities. case.

You're in a workplace or in the golf club or wherever you are, and somebody does you harm.

Everybody else is watching to see what you're going to do, and they're expecting you to get your own back, to get them and sort them, because they did you wrong.

[25 : 19] See if you don't do that. See if you try to bless them and love them and refuse to speak badly about them, that is going to stand out.

And people are going to ask you, why on earth are you choosing to live like that? Because Jesus loves me, and he loves them, and I want you to glorify God in my living.

This is where we get opportunities to talk about our faith without speaking about it first. People notice how we live, and they are confused by it.

Why are you doing that? And we freely get to say, because Jesus loves me, and he loves them, and he loves you, and I want to be a blessing in our community rather than part of the problem.

When we suffer for living well, we know that the Lord will not abandon us, but he will bless us in all things. When we suffer for living well, we find that the Lord brings before us opportunities to share the good news of his love with everyone.

[26 : 37] In a strange and hostile world, we are to live for Jesus. We do not live for Jesus to gain his blessing. We do not obey God to earn anything from him.

We are already blessed in Christ Jesus, our Lord. God, we have already been saved and forgiven and renewed and restored and reconciled to God through the cross of Jesus.

We live in God's way, in obedience to God's word, so that we might share his blessing with others.

We live on public display, so that we might make Jesus known to a world that doesn't know him.

We live as good citizens because we long for the common good and we long for everyone in our community to be blessed.

We don't live for ourselves. We live for Jesus and his glory. This is the gospel. Let's pray together.

[27 : 43] Father, we thank you for all those before us who lived godly lives through whom we were blessed as you made Jesus known to us.

And so we pray in our turn that you would set a zeal within us for a good life, to bless others, to serve the common good, to be passionate about justice and righteousness, righteousness, to live in ways that serve and bless others.

And we pray that as we do this, many would come to know Jesus for themselves. We pray that you would transform our communities through our godly living.

Be a blessing through us to others, we pray. In Jesus' name, Amen. Amen.