

Get Up and Grow: Goodness

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[0 : 00] Good morning everyone. It's a pleasure to be back here at St Paul's bringing the Word of God this morning and to have been asked to share with you.

My wife Vanessa and I are here from Africa for roughly two to three months and we'd love to catch up with you during that time. Vanessa arrives tonight, late tonight on a plane from Perth and we'll probably be having a rest for a few days but after that we'd love to catch up with any and all of you. Now the epistle of Peter, the first epistle of Peter is an epistle that Peter has written to Christians who are scattered throughout a pagan society.

And it is a letter written to Christians who in their context will be undergoing suffering and persecution and where the values of the society around them are putting a pressure upon them to live a particular way.

And so it's in this context that we look at the passage here today. It's quite applicable this passage really in that light for us here in Sydney and the church in Sydney.

[1 : 18] And although persecution here is not as overt as it was in the Roman Empire, it is nonetheless it is there and it is underlying a lot of the fabric of our society.

And you will hear Christians and the Christian faith openly mocked on television or on the radio. There is so much media coming through with anti-God values.

And so in that way our society in Sydney has a lot of things that are similar to the society back in the days of the Roman Empire. And of course they had gladiator events, then we have the rugby league.

But there's a lot of similarities there and there is nonetheless a pressure on us as Christians to be living and responding a certain way when confronted and surrounded by people from a pagan society.

So when this passage opens, we see it says, Dear friends, I urge you as aliens and strangers in the world to abstain from sinful desires which war against your soul.

[2 : 27] 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. These desires actually wage war against our soul.

And in the passage, I don't actually think Peter is so much talking about the sinful desires of the flesh or about anger or greed or coveting as much as I think he is talking about things simply like submitting to authorities, respecting one another, respecting one another, loving one another, and honouring the king, fearing God.

These are all temptations that with the pressure of the society around them, acting upon them, it is a temptation not to do these things. Not only are these things waging war against our soul and against their soul, but we have an enemy, as Sam points out, we are in a war against an enemy who roams around like a roaring lion waiting for someone to devour.

And you see, the devil knows that Christians have a righteousness that is by faith. Our righteousness is because we believe that Jesus has died for our sins, and because of that, we are made completely righteous before God.

And that is based on what we believe. And so the devil knows that while ever we believe that, and while ever our faith is at this level, then the life we live will accordingly be at an equal level.

[4 : 07] And so the devil's main aim is to get us to doubt, to get us to not believe that Jesus has paid the full penalty, not just for our sins, but for all our brothers' and sisters' sins.

He does this through our conscience. That is the main weapon he uses, is our conscience. You know, Peter says later in the passage, he talks about not using our freedom as a cloak for evil, to hide sin.

It is very easy in that society and in our society to compromise our values as Christians, to compromise our walk with God, and actually say, well, that's okay, I'm under grace. I'm under grace, so I'm under freedom, so it doesn't really matter what I do so much. But, you see, because we have an enemy, and that enemy will use a pure conscience, and he will come to someone with a pure conscience, and he will try and get them to stop believing they are righteous because of what Christ has done, let alone if we go forward with an impure conscience. If we go forward and go forward willingly in sin, then the devil will use the fact that our conscience is muddied, he will use that to get us to doubt that we are righteous before God, and that we are completely forgiven because he knows that our walk will be always equivalent with what we believe. [5 : 45] In 2 Peter 1, verses 5 to 9, it says, for this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness, and to goodness knowledge, and to knowledge self-control, and to self-control perseverance, and to perseverance godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love.

For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins. You see, the problem with a backslidden Christian is not primarily about what he is doing. The problem with the backslidden Christian is about what they have started to believe. And what they have started to believe, their faith will naturally come out in what they do. If we are living lives where our conscience gets seared, we will start forgetting that we have been cleansed from our past sins, because that is what the devil will be helping us do by saying, you're guilty, you're not forgiven.

And we will forget we have been cleansed from past sins, and as a result, we will live accordingly to that. Our faith has to issue itself in action.

[7 : 17] What we believe will always be demonstrated by what we do. And in a context where the society's values have decayed, and Christians are suffering and are being persecuted, the threat of Christians using the freedom they have in Christ as a cover-up for evil, and subsequently forgetting their cleansing from past sins, was a very real one to Peter.

So when Peter goes through this passage, there are really primarily three things that he is on about, and the first thing he is on about, it is God's will that by doing good, you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men.

That is the first thing in this passage he is addressing. The Christians are in a context where for the Lord's sake, they need to submit to all those authorities, and we need to submit authorities always anyway, but especially in this pagan world where they are under such scrutiny.

See, the unbelieving world watches us like a hawk. They watch us so carefully and try and find where we slip up. And so what Peter is saying is that we have to live such blameless lives in that world by submitting to authorities, by honouring the king, by fearing God, by loving one another, that they have absolutely no substance to any of the foolish accusations that they make against the people of God.

And so that those accusations have no substance. We might remember back in Genesis chapter 41 when we saw Joseph, and he was in Egypt, and he was there with a pagan king and a pagan society, and yet this pharaoh was able to say, was able to say, can we find anyone like this man, one in whom is the Spirit of God?

[9 : 21] A pagan pharaoh. And back then, of course, there was no, you know, no one really officially knew the Holy Spirit in that way. But see, the pharaoh could look at Joseph and he could see that inside that man was something different, and he could tell by the way he conducted himself, by the insight he was given, and by the man that he was, he could tell that in that society this was someone who stood out, and he could tell that within him, even though being a pagan, he could tell that within him was a holy God, was a Holy Spirit.

And similarly, in Babylon, when Daniel had been taken into captivity with the rest of Israel, King Nebuchadnezzar said of Daniel, he had named him Belteshazzar after the name of his God, and he said, he is called Belteshazzar after the name of my God, and the Spirit of the Holy Gods is in him. This is coming from a king who made giant golden statues and asked people to come and bow down to them, or he was going to chuck them into a furnace.

This is a pagan king, and yet he was able to look at Daniel and say, the Spirit of the Holy God is in him. You are the light of the world.

A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.

[11 : 01] In the same way, let your light shine before men that they may see your good deeds, and praise your Father in heaven. It brings God glory when the people of God are living in such a way that the pagan world looks at them as blameless, and that when they are making their accusations, everyone can see that they've got no substance to it.

That brings glory to God. Similarly, it brings slander and blasphemy to the way of Christians and to Christ himself if we are living in society and we are walking forward in sin.

And so, part of that, and what Peter is saying, is that to silence the talk of foolish men, we need to submit to the authorities that have been put in place. And of course, we learn in Romans 13, verses 1 to 3, everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established, and the authorities that exist have been established by God.

Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. I mean, it's pretty straightforward.

Unfortunately, as Aussies, we come from originally a settlement of convicts, so we have a bit of an attitude to authority, which works a little bit like this.

[12 : 23] I figured it out from being, well, it's not that hard to figure out, actually, but you see it very clearly when you're living in another culture where submission to authority is a very, very different thing.

So, the way our thinking works is like this. This man is in authority. What's he doing? What's he saying? And so, we sort of judge and rate what he is doing and saying, and then determine from our judgment and our rating as to whether we should submit to his authority or not.

Now, in Africa, submission to authority can be authorities who are treating them very badly, but they will always submit to the authority because submission to authority is not about what the person in authority does or says, it is about his position.

Completely unconditional. It is about his position. It is a position that we know that God has given to that person and so, like they do in Africa, we should submit to the authorities that have been put in place simply because of the position they have been given by God.

And in so doing, we are acknowledging that it is God who put them there and we are confirming that the word of God is true. And so, it is for the Lord's sake that we do this.

[13 : 49] Now, the second point that Peter is making here is suffering for doing good is commendable. Suffering for doing good is commendable. And I am sure at this stage, Peter was recalling Jesus' words in Luke chapter 6 which are also recorded in Matthew chapter 5.

He says, But I tell you who hear me, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.

If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic. Give to everyone who asks you and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back.

Do to others as you would have them do to you. If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? If you just love those who love you? Even sinners love those who love them and if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you?

Even sinners do that. And if you lend to those from you what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners expecting to be repaid in full but love your enemies, do good to them and lend to them without expecting to get anything back.

[15 : 09] Then your reward will be great and you'll be sons of the Most High because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful just as your father is merciful.

And so it is only in the light of being mistreated and being harshly spoken to and being unfairly done by, it is only in the light of our response to that that people will see that we are in actual fact different and the one that is in us is different to the one that is in the world.

Otherwise we're just doing what the world does. We just, I mean, we can be Christians and we can be really nice people who are really nice to the people who are really nice to us. But let me ask you a question.

Is there anyone on your heart who you do not look at as absolutely righteous and spotless before God? Is there another human being in your heart, in your mind, who you do not look at as absolutely spotless?

And if they don't know Christ, that they potentially could and therefore that you should still treat them in that light. Or are we storing up all the faults that people have, all the things they've said wrong against us, all the times they've ticked us off a bit?

[16:30] You see, Jesus has wiped our slate completely clean and we have got to do that right now with anyone we are storing things up about that we should not be storing up about.

Because in God's sight, they are completely holy and righteous. In God's sight, they are completely holy and righteous.

So if there's anyone in the body of believers that we have got a problem with, then we are really having a problem with God because God has declared them innocent.

God has declared them righteous. God has declared them pure and faultless. And that's how we have to treat them and that's how God expects us to treat them.

So if your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat. If he is thirsty, give him water to drink. And in doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head and the Lord will reward you.

[17:42] And doing this is a powerful testimony to the one we worship and is a form of spiritual warfare. I think in 2 Corinthians 10, verses 3 to 4, it says, For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does.

The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. And we can be very spiritual and we can say, well, that's the prayers of the saints.

And I think it definitely includes that. But I tell you, when you turn the other cheek when someone strikes you, it demolishes strongholds. When you love those who hate you, when you bless those who curse you, when you pray for those who persecute you, you demolish strongholds.

It is a form of warfare. Jesus didn't say these things without demonstrating them in his life.

He demonstrated all these principles through what he did. And we might remember in Matthew chapter 27, verses 12 to 14, when he was accused by the chief priests and the elders, he gave no answer.

[18:53] Then Pilate asked him, Don't you hear the testimony they are bringing against you? But Jesus made no reply, not even to a single charge, to the great amazement of the governor.

I don't know about you, but if I was Jesus and I had people saying to me, are you the king of the Jews? I'd start pointing them to all the miracles I'd done. I'd start saying, am I the king?

I mean, have a look. I walked on water. I mean, I made the lame walk. I made the blind see. I cast demons out of men. But he doesn't do any of that.

He just says, so you say. You see, the powers of darkness are baffled when we do not wage war on the same terms and in the same fashion that they wage war.

That's what confuses them. And Jesus said to his disciples, if anyone would come after me, he must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me.

[20:00] For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. Whoever loses his life for me will find it. Are we prepared to do that?

Are we prepared, just as Jesus set us an example and going before us, are we prepared to follow in that example and lose our lives for Christ's sake?

Are we prepared to suffer ridicule and meet it with love? Are we prepared to bless those who persecute us and pray for those who are bad to us?

Are we prepared if our enemy is hungry to feed him or if he is thirsty to give him a drink? You see, as Brian said earlier, we are in a war.

We are in a war and the people of this world are suffering because they are under the power of slavery to fear of death. And the powers of darkness use the fact that there are handwritten requirements of the law which are built up in their conscience against them and they know that the handwritten requirements of the law, the wages of those requirements is death.

[21:21] Everyone knows it. You might have people saying, I'm an atheist, but they know it. They know it. We all know because in our conscience we know when we've done something wrong.

And those things build up and up and up and up and up and the powers of darkness use those things and constantly hold them up to people to show them you're going to die, you're under sin, you're going to hell and it keeps them in that guilt and it keeps them pinned down in a sinful lifestyle.

And the way to battle it is to proclaim that those powers have been defeated at the cross of Christ. That's the irony is we defeat those powers by proclaiming that they have been defeated.

It says that Christ paraded them and he took that handwritten requirements, that list of handwritten requirements and he nailed it to the cross. Taking us up with him into that cross and purging us of all our sin, all our judgment, all our guilt.

so that we are completely pure. So that we can live a godly life. Because the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men and it teaches us to say no to ungodliness and worldly passions while we wait for the blessed hope, the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.

[23 : 10] So my friends, surrounded by a similar world that the Christians were surrounded in then, there's not as much overt violence in our society, but given the right pressures, there would be.

But surrounded by a pagan society, we have to be those whose goodness is shining out of us, who are shining the light of Christ to a dark and sinful world.

God bless you.