

Behave in Ways That Impress Pagans • 1 Peter 2:9-12

Christianity has often shown brightest during the darkest times. In the early centuries Christians were persecuted and executed because they were believers in Jesus Christ. The way they died both stunned and attracted the pagans to Jesus and the Gospel. One of the early church historians named Tertullian said, “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.”

But this was not just a first century phenomenon. Christians are putting their lives at risk and behaving Christianly in the twenty-first century as well. I recently received e-mail from a friend who had just returned from a difficult trip to Iran and Afghanistan. Both countries are overwhelmingly Muslim with very few Christians. Did you know that there are followers of Jesus in Iran? It is claimed that there have been more new believers in Jesus in Iran since the Ayatollah Khomeini and the Islamic Revolution than in all previous history combined. There are now up to twenty-five Christian churches in Iran. They are mostly secret churches, but the largest is a congregation of about seven hundred people. The Christians of Iran, who share a similar language and culture to the Afghans, have risked their lives in the midst of gunfire to take food and relief articles into refugee camps inside Afghanistan in order to show the love of Jesus.

Whether in the first or the twenty-first century, Christians are to behave in ways that impress unbelievers. Those unbelievers may be pagans in the Roman Empire, Afghans in a war zone or our own neighbors next door in the communities where we live. The behavior of Christians powerfully shows people what Jesus Christ is like and why it is good to be his follower. Here is the way it is described in the New Testament by Peter in I Peter 2:9-12:

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the

praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

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.

It all begins with what a Christian is. You know that you can be something and not fully appreciate who you are. Sometimes even as Christians we don't realize who we are. That is one of the outcomes of the September 11 terrorist attacks. Millions of Americans gained a sudden and deep awareness and appreciation of who they are. It is called patriotism. Or there are those who grow up in loving and stable families and fail to appreciate it because that is all they have ever known. Years later they see unloving, unstable families and appreciate for the first time the heritage that is theirs.

Let me tell you a personal experience. I have a friend named Leslie Flynn. He is actually a generation or so older than

I. He has been a prolific author and has written a whole library of books. Years ago he told me that I should write a book. I didn't do it because I didn't want to fail. I didn't want to be rejected. But he kept after me, encouraging me. He saw something in me that I didn't see in myself.

That's the way Peter sees Christians. Some people don't believe. Some people reject Jesus Christ. But, you are a Christian.

What is a Christian? Peter tells us in I Peter 2:9-10:

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who calls you out of dark-

“But you are a chosen people” God picked you for his team. God chose you!

ness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

That is you he is talking about! If you are a Christian every one of these adjectives describes who you are. You are chosen. God chose you to be on his team!

I have never been a very good athlete. I did get a varsity letter in high school, but barely. I certainly wasn't as good at sports as many others when growing up. I remember how painful it was in grade school when they picked teams during gym classes. It could be awful not being picked. You stand there as two teams are created, seeing the camaraderie build as the teams are selected. You wait—hoping you will not be the last one chosen. There were a few times when I was picked first. Not because I was good but because a friend was doing the choosing. It felt great! I was important. I was included. It made me want to do my very best.

“But you are a chosen people” God picked you for his team. God chose you! Not because you are good but because he likes you. God loves you. God chose you.

You are a royal priesthood. You know what it is like to get caught up in a company's voicemail system. You push all the numbers and then go around in circles. You can never get through to the person you need to talk to.

Every Christian is a priest to God. That means that every Christian has direct access to God himself. It's like being given God's private phone number. It's like having the PIN number of God so that you can get right through. And you are not just an ordinary priest; you are a royal priest. You are part of the family of Jesus Christ the King. You have the key to the palace and direct access to God himself.

You are a holy nation. “Holy” means “different”. Christians are different in that we are like God. We belong to a nation of God-like citizens. That means that we don't quite look like, think like or act like everybody else.

At the Olympic games every athlete wears the name and the flag of the nation he or she rep-

resents. It is considered an honor to compete for Norway, Spain, Germany, Japan, China or the United States of America.

If you are a Christian you are in the Olympics of life as a citizen of heaven. That means that you wear the name and flag of God. How totally impressive! What an indescribable honor!

You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God. There is enormous value in belonging to God.

Suppose I held up a pen and asked you how much you think it is worth. If it were a Bic you would say one dollar. If it were a Mont Blanc you might guess more than \$100 dollars. If I told you this pen used to belong to George Washington, Abraham Lincoln or John Kennedy you might guess \$10,000. What's the difference? Same pen. Same ink. The value is determined by who owned it.

Christians belong to God. We are worth more than money could ever buy. We are worth billions of dollars and much more. We belong to God!

We are Christians! We praise God because he made us into Christians. We once were in total darkness. We were sinners; lost. We didn't have an outside chance. We were nobody. We needed mercy but we hadn't received mercy. Then everything changed! We became Christians. God gave us mercy, life, salvation, purpose and more. It is an extraordinary transformation to become a Christian.

You are something special. But perhaps you don't feel so special. There are days when you feel unimportant, unappreciated and just plain lousy. But let me say something directly but kindly. How we feel is not important. If you have accepted Jesus as your Savior and Lord, if you are a Christian, this is what you are whether you feel like it nor not. (Some people win the lottery but don't feel rich. Some people—after their wedding—don't feel married. A woman may be pregnant but not feel pregnant.) The best advice is to start feeling the way you are because being a Christian is a very good thing.

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belong-

ing to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (I Peter 2:9-10)

That is who you are. That's what a Christian is. But now let's check out what a Christian does:

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.

If we are Christians then we ought to live as Christians. It wouldn't make any sense to behave like "unbelievers". It wouldn't be good to behave as if we weren't on God's team, as if we weren't priests, as if we were citizens of some other nation, as if we didn't belong to God.

As citizens of heaven we are visitors on earth. While we are visiting here God does not want us to cave in to our sinful desires. We probably all know what this means—it's doing those things we all think about doing but know we shouldn't do.

Do you ever want to steal? Do you ever feel like lying? Do you think about having an affair? Would you like to hate people because of their race or religion? Do you want to hold on to resentment against someone who offended you? How about ripping off some poor people so that you can get ahead? And then there is greed, envy, profanity, obscenity, pride and violence. What did I forget? What are the sinful desires that tempt your head and heart? What would you do if you weren't a Christian but shouldn't do because you are a Christian?

Don't do it! Don't surrender to sinful desires. These desires are at war against our souls. They are out to attack our souls and destroy us. There is simply no place for evil in the life of a Chris-

tian. So, make every effort to keep evil out.

There is another reason for us to avoid evil and do good. It's not just for us; it's for the reputation of God. Since Christians wear the label *Christ-ian*, everything we say and do reflects on Jesus Christ. Before we act with good behavior or with bad behavior we need to think about how it makes God look. It's not just about our happiness, our comfort, our career, our car, our family, our school and our lives. We are Christians—everything we say and do reflects on Jesus.

When someone wears a uniform every word and action reflects upon that company. What do you think if you are treated well or treated poorly by a person wearing a uniform for UPS, Northwest Airlines or McDonalds? Your attitude toward the company is determined by the behavior of the representatives of the company.

Christians wear the uniform of God. Everything we say and do either makes God look good or makes God look bad. As Christians we want to make God look good. In fact, to "glorify God" means to make God look good.

There are two ways to make God look good: don't do bad things; do good things. So, what makes God look good? Praying for our neighbors; standing against racism at work; giving money to feed the hungry; babysitting for free for a friend who is broke; helping someone who is looking for a job to get an interview at the company where we work; forgiving a relative who

has treated us unfairly and really doesn't care; sticking with a marriage that is bad and trying to make it good. These are all

ways that we can make God look very good.

Does this mean that unbelievers will become Christians? Will they be impressed? They may be; but they may not be. That is not what should determine our behavior. We should avoid evil and do good because we are Christians regardless of how other people respond. Remember, Peter says in I Peter 2:11-12:

Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sin-

We are Christians—everything we say and do reflects on Jesus.

ful 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.

Recently, a husband told me the story of his marriage. His wife became a Christian and he didn't like it. He ridiculed her. He antagonized her. He mocked her. He was rotten to her. He said that she was consistently Christian in her attitude and actions toward him for months and years. Finally he decided that if that is what a Christian is then he wanted to become one. That is exactly what Peter was talking about!

For most of us, life isn't easy. There are problems, difficulties, discouragements and challenges. But, we are Christians. We must live Christianly in the face of life's circumstances.

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

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.

You are a Christian! Make God look good!

Faith Matters® is the Broadcast Ministry of
Leith Anderson and Wooddale Church
6630 Shady Oak Road
Eden Prairie MN 55344
952-944-6300
www.faithmatters.fm
©Leith Anderson