

SECRETS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

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By the Book™ A Chapter by Chapter Bible Study
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Let's Begin

The great English Baptist, Charles Haddon Spurgeon once said, "The way of righteousness is a difficult pass between two mountains of error, and the great secret of the Christian's life is to wind his way along the narrow valley." Spurgeon got it right—sometimes it is difficult to live the Christian life, displaying all the beauty God intended it to be. The Scripture teaches "we are His workmanship," created for His purposes (Eph. 2:8-10). God made us in His image and remade us in the image of Christ when He saved us.

Even so, how are we to live? What makes us different from the world around us? What is the secret to living the Christian life as God intended us to live? The Apostle Peter gives us clear answers to these questions in 1 Peter 2. He shows us the secrets of the Christian life.

Therefore, as we make our way through chapter two, let's focus on the outline below:

- I. The Loveliness of the Christian Life (vv. 1-10)**
- II. The Submissiveness of the Christian Life (vv. 11-17)**
- III. The Graciousness of the Christian Life (vv. 18-25)**

I. The Loveliness of the Christian Life (vv. 1-10)

The first secret of the Christian life is its *loveliness*. When the Christian community lives like her Lord, she is a beauty to behold. In fact, the Apostle Paul spoke of the church as the "bride of Christ." Addressing the Corinthians, Paul presented the church "as a pure bride to her one husband" (2 Cor. 11:2, 3; cp. also (John 3:29; Matt. 9:15; 25:1-13; Mark 2:19; Luke 5:34-35). The Apostle John was no less explicit in his pronouncement of the church as the Lord's bride who bids all come to the salvation found in Jesus Christ alone (Rev. 22:17). Hence, who can dispute the Lord's choice of a beautiful bride, a bride "not having spot, or wrinkle...but...holy and without blemish"? (Eph. 5:27).

Even so, if the loveliness of the Christian life is one of its secrets, what makes the Christian life lovely? What is the source of its beauty?

Peter opens the chapter with a focus on moral *purity*. He writes, "Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious" (vv. 1-3).

While *moral purity* is not the chief quality that makes for loveliness of the people of God (as we shall see below), moral purity is nevertheless an important quality for loveliness. Peter commands believers to actively "lay aside" those attitudes and actions displaying ugliness unbecoming of the Lord's bride. The term Peter uses is a strong term meaning "rid yourselves" or "cast aside" those things which mark worldliness. One mark indicative of the world is "malice," the Greek word is *kakia*, denoting wickedness and habitual depravity. Another is "guile"

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(*dolos*), which favors deceit and craftiness. The term often was used of bait, which hunters used to catch prey.

In addition, “hypocrisies” were also to be put away. The Greek term is *hypokrisis*, which came to mean “the acting of a player on stage.” Peter’s meaning undoubtedly refers to those who cover over their moral ugliness with masks pretending to be one thing when they are underneath entirely another person, a wicked person. Whether it is outward actions as we have noted above or inward attitudes like “envies” all the moral blemishes must be forsaken while the beauty of Christ’s holiness shines through. How is this accomplished? Through the “sincere milk of the word,” every believer may “grow” in holiness and moral beauty. Through God’s Word, we learn what pleases the Lord. Indeed it is not too much to say that no one can know or live the will of God apart from the Word of God.

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As we indicated earlier, while the moral *purity of life* makes for the loveliness of the Christian, the most significant quality of the Christian life is the *Person of the Lord*—Christ Jesus Himself. Peter writes, “To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious...Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded...the same is made the head of the corner, And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence...” (vv. 4-8).

Peter begins by expressing what Christ is *personally*. He is the “living stone.” Peter is playing on words, for stones are inanimate (i.e. stones have no life). Jesus, however, is a “living” stone for He rose from the dead. Indeed everything about Christ is living! He is the living water, the living bread, the living way, and the living truth. Hence, He is the *supernatural* stone, the stone “chosen” before the worlds were made (cp. Gen. 49:24; Isa. 8:14; 28:16; Ps. 118:22).

Being supernatural, He is also the “precious” stone, held in highest regard and only suitable for the chief “cornerstone.” Even so, He remains a “stumbling” stone and “rock of offense” for those who do not believe (v. 8). Peter cites the Jewish elders or “builders” who “disallowed” the stone and became disobedient to the Lord of glory. The very stone God chose, Israel rejected.

What is more, the very stone God chose to be the only Savior, people continue to reject today. He is the cornerstone of salvation, the precious Savior, and the rock of redemption upon which all people may confidently stand. Nonetheless, people still reject Him and live in disobedience. Hence, He becomes the “rock of offense” to all who “disallow” the forgiveness of sin, for which He paid when He died on the cross.

Consequently, believers who look to the living stone by faith become “living stones” themselves. Hear well Peter’s words, “Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable

Reflection Connection

Think about the people to whom you have shared the Gospel lately. What are the reasons people offer when they refuse to consider the Gospel? Be prepared to share with the entire group.



to God by Jesus Christ" (v. 5). The house God builds out of "living stones" is a lovely house, a beautiful house. We are lovely, first and foremost, because we are built upon the chief cornerstone, the living stone, the Lord Jesus. We are undeniably connected to Him! Our loveliness has its ultimate origin in the loveliness of Jesus Christ.

II. The Submissiveness of the Christian Life (vv. 11-17)

Not only is loveliness a secret of the Christian life, but also submissiveness is also a secret of the Christian life. Peter writes, "Dearly beloved, I beseech you...abstain from fleshly lusts...Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that...they may by your good works...glorify God in the day of visitation. Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man... As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God. Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king" (vv. 11-17).

Peter reveals two overarching notions in this passage of Scripture. On the one hand he is concerned with *personal discipline*, and on the other, he deals with *public deportment*. Each goes hand in hand with the other. Submission to the Lord requires we guard our *personal character*; however, we must also guard our *public conduct*. Hence, interwoven throughout these verses Peter addresses these twin notions.

First, he appeals to their status as "strangers and pilgrims." Our present world is not our home; we are only passing through. Worldly fashions, fads, trends, or standards cannot pull the pilgrim into its reach. To look to this world only brings "war against the soul." Life becomes a military expedition rather than an adventure. Therefore, believers must "abstain" from "fleshly lusts." The Greek term translated "abstain" is *apechomai*, which means "to be away from" or "to be distant." One must distance oneself from those things which tempt toward displeasing actions or attitudes to the Lord. Instead one must live honestly before unbelievers. Why? According to Peter, because they may, by seeing our good works, glorify God on judgment day! Whether Peter means temporal judgment as in a disaster or the judgment bar of God is hard to tell. Whatever the case, the loveliness of our lives as we walk surrendered to Him offers unbelievers an undeniable testimony to the grace of the Lord Jesus.

Additionally, as Peter speaks clearly of our *public conduct* before a watching world, he notes the humble submission every Christian should display. Believers are to "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man...to the king, as supreme; Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers..." (vv. 13-14a). The Greek term translated "submit yourselves" is



Reflection Connection

If our government is to be obeyed as Peter commands (cp. Rom. 13:1-6), when is it right, if ever, to disobey the government? Explain.

hupotasso, and is primarily a military term meaning “to rank under,” and denoted putting soldiers under direct subjection. In essence, it meant to obey.

Peter’s meaning is clear: *our government is to be respected and obeyed*. Of course, this does not mean government laws are absolute. In other words, Peter is not suggesting we must obey human law on a par with or superior to God’s law. In fact, the Apostles broke the law when they were ordered to stop preaching Jesus (cp. Acts 5:29). On the other hand, when government sets up just laws which do not compel us to breach God’s clear commands in Scripture, we have a moral obligation to respect the law whether “the king, as supreme; Or unto governors” (vv. 13-14a; 17). As Peter puts it, “For so is the will of God” (v. 15a).

What is more, Christians should never use liberty as “a cloke of maliciousness,” but indicative of submission to God, as “servants of God” (v. 16). Far too many believers appeal to their liberty to cloak all kinds of unbecoming behavior. Some will even cite winning the lost as a reason to recreationally use beverage alcohol. Peter frowns on covering our “fleshly lusts” with a sugar-coating. For him, it is nothing more than a “cloke of maliciousness.”

III. The Graciousness of the Christian Life (vv. 18-25)

Not only is the Christian life *lovely* which remains one of its secrets, but also the Christian life is *submissive*. The third secret of the Christian life is its *graciousness*. Peter explains, “Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward. For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. 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” (vv. 18-20).

Peter mentions once again the significance of submission. However, in this particular instance, the practical exhortation is not Christians in submission to government, but slaves in submission to masters. The question begs itself: Why no outright assault on the institution of slavery? Because Christianity was not a socio-political movement. Had it been, it would have been squashed out like every other socio-political rival to the Roman Empire in the first century. Instead the Christian faith was a spiritual revolution, unstoppable in nature, and impossible to capture and contain by chains and swords. Paul wrote “the word of God is not bound” (2 Tim. 2:9). In essence, since bondage is a spiritual condition, Christianity created a world where slavery could not survive.

Peter exhorts Christians to live gracious lives wherever they find themselves. We are to live “good and gentle” lives even when we find ourselves “suffering wrongfully.” Striking at the heart of casual, easy faith, Peter blows the lid off of our comfortable Christianity. He counsels believers, “when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God” (v. 20). How are Christians able to live like this? The fact is, we cannot—at least we cannot in our own strength. Only through the power of Christ living in and through us are we able to live the gracious life. Through persistent service and patient suffering, we display graciousness, the secret of Christian living.

The Apostle ends this section by focusing on the cross as we come full circle. All the secrets of the Christian life begin with Christ and end with Him. He

Reflection Connection

Does living a gracious life imply Christians will be easy on sin and should more often than not, just let things go? After all, shouldn’t we just show “grace” and “kindness”? Explain.



is the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last (Rev. 1:18). As he wraps up the secrets of the Christian life, Peter explains *three aspects* of the cross of Christ. First, he explains the *virtuous nature* of the cross (vv. 22-23). Jesus “suffered for us” even though He “did no sin” nor was “guile found in his mouth.” In no way did Christ succumb to sin though he was tempted in all points like us (cp. Heb. 4:15). In addition, not only did Christ live sinlessly, Christ suffered silently. “No guile” made its way to His lips. The term translated “guile” is the very term Peter insisted believers must set aside (v. 1). He was silent before His enemies. When “reviled” He took no vengeance but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously” (v. 23).

Second, Peter explains the *vicarious nature* of the cross. He writes, “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” (v. 24). While we may follow Jesus by living *virtuous* lives, we find it impossible to follow Jesus by living *vicarious* lives—at least not the kind of vicariousness Jesus displayed. No one ever suffered like Jesus and no one ever will. Taking the entire sin weight of the world upon Himself, he suffered in our place. He “bore our sin”; He took our punishment; He gave His life. And, it is through “his stripes we are healed.” Consequently, the outcome cannot be measured: believers become “dead to sins” so we may “live unto righteousness,” the righteousness found in Him, not ourselves nor the law.

Finally, Peter explains the *victorious nature* of the cross (v. 25). Though our deplorable condition as wandering sheep displayed a rebellious heart, the Shepherd delighted in restoring His lost flock. Those who were “gone astray” have returned; we are restored to God through the Lord Jesus Christ. Hence, it is through Him our lives reveal the same graciousness He has shown to us.

Golden Greek Nugget

Peter assures his readers when Jesus was “reviled” He did not “revile” in return (v. 23). The phrase “when he was reviled” is a single Greek term—*loidoreo*; it carries the idea of abuse and vilifying. Jesus was abused by His tormentors, but He never lifted a finger against them. They made Him a villain, killing Him on the cross; He became Victor by rising from the tomb.

Wrap Up

In this study, we have examined three secrets of the Christian life. No better place to begin exists than looking to Jesus Who remains the source of our loveliness. Even more, Christ also compels us to surrender to God in the same sense He surrendered Himself up to die on the cross. Even so, our lives must display the same graciousness He shows to us. We do not deserve salvation. Yet our Lord is pleased to give us salvation nonetheless. What a Savior we serve!

