Our Walk in the Presence of the Unsaved

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One verse written by an apostle can provide a whole sermon for the preacher. So we take one verse out of Peter's first epistle, the second chapter, and we'll try to bring some helpful thoughts from it, as God may enable, 2:12, these words, having your conversation honest among the Gentiles, that whereas they speak evil against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.

Of course you will understand the construction here. We break right into the middle of it, following a semicolon, having. So, what he says is, have your conversation honest among the Gentiles, or live honestly among the Gentiles. For conversation doesn't mean talk as it did then, it means life, living.

Now, one of the big questions that any earnest Christian must settle is, what should be my attitude toward the Gentiles? And by Gentiles we simply mean the unsaved among whom we live. What should be my attitude toward the unsaved with whom I am forced most of my lifetime to live? And when I say most of my lifetime, I am not speaking lightly, but accurately. Because though Christians tend to flock together, still the greater part of a Christian's time on earth is likely to be spent among the Gentiles.

First, let's notice that Christians do tend to flock together. They come together at times like this. They come together in various meetings here and there, anything from the lowly Sunday school picnic to the high mass or something else. People who claim to be Christians at any rate flock together, and real Christians flock together. And the reasons are many and very full, I believe.

In the first place, we Christians belong to another racial group. You will pardon my repeating that, for I said it twice before. Ye are a chosen generation, another, a different breed. You are a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people.

And thus, we form a sort of other racial group within the race into which we were originally born. We are strangers, but not strangers to each other. And therefore, it is perfectly natural that the human, human beings should want to go with their own group because we understand each other's language.

I can understand why Polish people and Swedish people and Lithuanian people and even German people tend to be clannish. We say they're clannish and smile, but it isn't clannishness so much as they like to hear somebody talk that doesn't talk with an accent. They want to get among the people who can bless their ears with that first sound they heard when they were born there across the water, or when they were old enough to hear sounds and know what they meant. And so, they bless their ears with good speech.

If you want to please a Scotsman, if you can do it, I can't, McAffee tries it, break out into braids Scots and he'll break out his face and get inches wider because he's blessing his ears with something he grew up with. The first time he remembered his mother or father, they spoke that language.

So, groups tend to get together because they love the sound of it. And Christians love to get together because they understand each other's language.

A minister of the gospel called me here in the city this last week, I think, or week before. And he said, Mr. Tozer, I'd like to, he talked about something else a while and then said, before I hang up, I'd like to say that I listen every Saturday morning to your broadcast, and I enjoy hearing them. And then I heard a female voice in the background, and he stopped him and he said, just a minute, he said, my wife tells me to tell you that she understands the language.

Now that, I don't know whether you get that or not, but that's the old camp meeting holiness expression. Yeah, I understand the language, brother. They used to say that and smile, some little old lady with a black hat to know and black clothing and a serious but happy face would say, I understand the language. Maybe raise a modest hand to heaven while they sang, she understood the language. And that's why Christians like to get together, because they understand each other's language, all the little accents that belong to Christians.

And then not only are we thus another racial group, but we are also another family, and families always like to get together.

The Tozers are the only family I know that don't. I have relatives I haven't seen for years and years. I was within 200 miles of a brother I hadn't seen for five- or six-years last winter and didn't go to see him. They're not mad at him, we're the best of friends, only we just don't, I don't know, it's car fare, I guess, or something. But mostly, we mostly, families like to get together. And out in country regions where they're less sophisticated, family reunions are great times.

When all those who are even remotely related to that crowd will come together and they'll sit around, some will never have met the other ones, new ones have been born the last year. The families like to get together; they have a lot in common. There's a tie that belongs to the family that belongs nowhere else on earth.

So, Christians belong to the same family, we're of the household of God, and God is our Father, after whom every family in heaven and earth is named. So that's why Christians love to get together.

And then they love to get together because of similar interests. You know how it is, if you're out with a crowd and one of them begins to talk about a camera, another one begins to talk about a camera, you might just as well keep still. Because if you get two camera bugs together, they'll know all about shutters and speed and things that I don't even know what they mean. I owned one once when I was a boy and gave it up. But the camera fiends, you know how they are.

And golf the same, and baseball, and hunters, a few old hunters round a potbelly stove in the country store. That's good for at least five hours, and several plugs of tobacco. As they sit around there and chew tobacco and talk about hunting, now they have a common interest there. And wherever you find people who are deeply interested, they like to get together. They'll pull out of the crowd and come together, literary interests and philosophical interests. And Christians have an interest, and it is one, not varied but single. And that's why Christians love to get together.

And then they like to get together because there's a moral encouragement that comes to a minority group by having the presence of other members of that minority group around them. So, for all those reasons, we love to get together.

But having said all this, it still remains true that the average Christian spends the greater part of his life on earth among the Gentiles. He spends the greater number of hours, the average Christian, greater number of hours and days and months and years, if it's added, among people that are not sympathetic with him, do not believe as he believes, and are not saved.

Take in work, for instance. Some of you never see a Christian from the time you leave your house in the morning till you return at night. Or if you do, you don't know they're Christians. You see someone walking down the street who may be a Christian, you don't know it, and it means nothing to you for the moment.

So, you literally live among the Gentiles from the time you say goodbye in the morning till you come back at night. And worse than that, some of you never see a Christian from the time you say goodbye to your friends at the church door Sunday evening until Wednesday or the next Sunday, because even in your home there are not Christians there. So, you spend literally the biggest part of your time, vastly greater part of your time, among people that are not Christians at all.

When you come to traveling, I was combing over in my memory how many Christians I have met on the trains. I've traveled quite a little over the United States, and I think I only remember one Christian that I thought, well, there's a man of God, and he was a colored porter. He talked to me when he saw me reading my Bible, but I always have my Bible, always have notebooks and pens, and always have a desk. And they all know it, but have never had a porter but once ever comment smilingly and with appreciation about my having my Bible there. You don't find them when you travel as a rule.

And how many Christians did you buy from this week? And if you were selling, how many Christians did you sell to? Now if you happen to work for Dietz, Scripture Press, or Moody Press, or some of the Christian groups, you probably did sell to some Christians. But for the most part, your buying and selling is not with Christians.

And in school, I want to ask you now, in school, you who have a classroom, maybe 40, 30, 40 in it, how many are Christians in that group? And how many of you have Christians living next door to them, on the East, or next door on the West? How many Christians are in your block there where you live? Think now, not very many, are there? Occasionally you'll find a couple of houses where both are Christians, but very rarely,

Mostly, God salts us down as we shake salt in the earth. Salt every place, and we don't touch each other, but we're scattered for most of the time. And therefore, because we spend a few hours a week with Christians, and spend many, many, many hours a week with the unsaved, it is vitally important that we have the answer to the question, what should my attitude be toward the unsaved?

Now as usual, God lays it down here in a broad precept. He doesn't give the details; He lays it down as a broad precept. He says, have your life honest among the Gentiles. Other translations have it, seemly, good and right, beyond reproach and upright. Let your conduct be seemly, let it be honest, let it be good and right, let it be beyond reproach, let it be upright.

All those words are used by various translators in an attempt to get the meaning of the Greek word which Peter used. Let your conversation be good and honest and upright and beyond reproach among the Gentiles. Now those or that is a broad precept, and the application of that precept is left to the circumstance, the time, and the individual.

Now right here I want to make a little note and tell you something that'll be well worth your remembering. Remember please that God never tells us anything that will enable us to get along without him. Write that down in your hat band, that God never tells us anything to us to get along without him.

God lays down what we read in our Scripture lesson precepts. He lays down broad principles of right, and then He allows the moment, the situation, the circumstances, the individual, and the context to determine how those principles shall be applied.

And therefore, it is never right to take the attitude that many do, well I have my Bible, I know what to do. Here it is. It's found in verse 9. I know what to do, I've got the answer. That's the attitude of unspiritual orthodoxy. That is, always sure it knows because it can quote the text.

But remember, brethren, the text is only the broad precept. The application of it takes the living presence of the Holy Ghost, takes humility and faith and earnest prayer and often painful cross-carrying in order to bring that precept into life and make it apply.

Orthodoxy says, I know the answer. Here it is in seven tenets. But the humble Christian knows better. He knows he's got the tenets there, all right, and he subscribes to them as ardently as any man. But how to make them apply at a given time and a given context, that takes the Holy Ghost and prayer and humility and sometimes fasting and prayer and sacrifice.

So always remember, being sound in the faith doesn't mean that God has tossed the Bible to you and said, here's the rulebook, goodbye. Follow the rules and you'll make it through the gates at last. Never, never.

God says, my boy, here is the rulebook. Here are the precepts for righteousness. Don't get puffed up now because you're a weak person and situations change, and like the dancer's circumstance, so you'll never quite know how to orientate yourself. You lean on Me hard. You trust Me constantly. You pray all the time, because otherwise you won't

know how to make that precept apply in the hour when you need it. Always remember, I repeat, God never tells you anything to enable you to get along without Him.

And if you were to memorize the whole Bible by heart, you'd still need the presence of God and the living influences of the Holy Ghost within you to enable you to live even the tiniest verse of that Bible.

So always God suspends us in space. We always like to get everything nailed down, get a marker there and put up a plaque. And when friends come, be able to point them and say, there's my religion, look at that. And that's solid, four legs, solid on the floor. Solid, there, there it is.

We like it that way. And we like to get a hold of our verses and then say, now I know how to run my life. And God says, no, my brother, my child, you only know the broad outline. The details must be filled in by prayer and faith and humility.

Now, the broad precept he lays down here, the attitude of the Christian. He says, be honest among the Gentiles, be seemly and good and right and beyond reproach and upright.

Now you see, those are all broad. There are no details given. But this is, at the beating heart of it, this is first. Because it is indispensable. You can know all the rules in the book, but unless you live a life that is honest and seemly and beyond reproach, it'll mean nothing to the Gentiles.

And then he says, though they may slander you, though they may speak against you as evildoers. Now one version has a cute little phrase thrown in here that he claimed, I believe it's Phillips, that he puts in that I rather like. He says, though they slander you in the usual way. Isn't there something sort of sadly humorous about that?

Though they slander you in the usual way, he says, sort of in parentheses. In other words, you understand the language. You know what I mean. They slander you in the usual way. Nevertheless, they're going to have to glorify God in the day of visitation. However we live now, those Christians in Peter's day, they expected to get slandered. It was standard procedure. And when somebody says, I've been slandered, somebody else said it as usual. In the usual way.

Now, why do the unsaved, the Gentiles, want to slander Christians? I believe there are a number of reasons. One is that the once-born react instinctively against the twice-born. This is the doctrine that people don't understand now, and not very many people are talking about it, but it's true. And if God ever sends a revival to the world, we'll all see it then, that the once-born react in hostility by instinct toward the twice-born. There were Cain and Abel, and Cain reacted hostilely against Abel.

Cain, the once-born, reacted in enmity toward Abel, the twice-born. There were the two brothers, Isaac and Ishmael. And Ishmael persecuted Isaac, the seed of the free woman, was persecuted by the seed of the bondwoman, by a natural hostility.

I don't know what scientists call it now, but there used to be a phrase they used. They called it natural enmity. And they said there were certain beasts that were natural

enemies. I do know that there are certain creatures that instinctively fear other creatures. Though they have been reared in a zoo or brought up around a house and have never seen those creatures, they instinctively fear them.

Every hunter will tell you that if he rides a horse and the horse begins to tremble and rear and snort and whinny, that he can be pretty sure that it's one of the horse's natural enemies, usually the bear. And the hunter, I suppose none of you here ever hunted for anything except collar buttons much, or your glasses.

But hunters know that a horse in the presence of a bear, just the smell of a bear over the next hill, he doesn't have to see him. And even though he's a young colt that's never been out hunting before and has never been within smelling distance of a bear, he goes all to pieces when he smells that bear. Every hunter knows that.

Well, now that's natural enmity. There's something in that horse that fears and hates that bear. And it's not experience, it's a natural reaction. So, the world may never have seen a Christian.

When we first went to China, you'll remember, back in the days of Jaffrey and Glover, when our missionaries first went to China and they walked in there, born again, men and women, they were called foreign devils. And they lived at the peril of their lives continually. The first instinctive reaction of Buddhistic Confucianist China was to react with hostility against the Christian because he was born again.

The Christian wasn't doing him any harm; he was just there. It's because the Christian has in him one spirit and the Gentiles have in him another, and those spirits will never get together. They can never compromise. Christ had in Him one Spirit, and all the world around Him had another.

And so, no matter what simple, innocent thing Christ did, they were on Him in a minute. Because not of what He did, not even of what He said, but because of what He was. So, you can count on it.

I mentioned this some time ago in a gathering, and there was no criticism of it, but there were questions. One fellow was very much worried, it seems, preaching like this would discourage young people from becoming Christians. So, you tell them that if they become Christians and the world will be against them, you'll discourage them.

Truth never stopped God's work. And to tell the truth never prevented anybody from being a Christian. But it's a terrible deception to present a Christianity that is only half Christianity to a young person. And then when the pressure comes and the spitballs begin to fly in his direction, he loses heart and quits. And we call him a backslider. No, he's not a backslider, he's somebody that never knew what he had hold of or what had hold of him. Tell them the truth, always remember it. The world will slander you, as in the usual way.

And then jealousy. Christians put the unsaved people to shame, and they're jealous of them, as Cain was jealous of Abel. And in their hostile attitude I notice a bit of bravado and bluster, and simulated enmity. But also, underneath there's a secret longing to be like the Christian.

As a young fellow, seventeen, I was saved. And some people that knew me, young fellow that knew me, I used to walk by the crowds on my way maybe to church and didn't mingle too much with that group of unsaved persons with whom I was thrown.

And one of them was afterwards converted, number of them converted, but one of them afterwards said to me, do you know the thing that moved my heart and put me under this conviction? Just your going and coming amongst, you didn't mingle, you just went and came. And it put me under conviction. They could say funny things and make cracks, but underneath was a gnawing uncertainty.

The presence of an honest Christian living an upright life in the midst of the Gentiles is God Almighty's most powerful instrument to condition men for the gospel of his Son, Jesus Christ.

So, a lot of this hostility is bravado, and a lot of big talk is just bluster. Really, in their secret hearts, God put eternity in even the sinner's heart, and he's not satisfied when he thinks somebody else has met the summum bonum and gotten a hold of that for which he was born, and he hasn't got it yet. He'll be mad, he'll say unpleasant things, he'll slander maybe, but the Scripture says they see your good works.

Remember, friends, moral beings cannot very long argue against righteousness. A moral being cannot argue against righteousness successfully very long. Hitler tried it. He defied all moral laws and turned righteousness into sin and sin into righteousness. And he roared louder over the airways probably than any other man has roared since the day of the bulls of Bashan. And his great armies went out.

But where's Hitler today? Poor, staggering, tired, heart-sick Germany was trying to find again the righteousness of her Reformers, trying where she can; is free to do it, to find again the thing she threw recklessly away under the needling of that great roaring bull. No, a nation can't argue very long against righteousness.

And in Russia, I think that there isn't anybody on earth, not even Joe McCarthy, that hates communism any more completely and bitterly and unequivocally than I do. I can't think of one lone thing in its favor, as we know it in Russia, and I can't think of ten thousand reasons why it ought to be exterminated like rabid dogs.

But I haven't anything against the Russian people. There are some of those old boot-wearing, stodgy, solid, high-cheeked-boned Slavs that are still believing in righteousness over there. They're whispering it, but they're still believing in it. And if they can ever overthrow the devils in the Kremlin, you'll find church spires pointing toward heaven all over the steps and tundra of Russia.

You can't successfully argue the validity of evil to a moral people. I mean, even an unsaved people who have a certain morality within them. So that when they see your good works, you've pretty near taken away their weapon. You've taken their gun out of their hand and thrown it in the ditch. They'll argue, they'll bluster, they'll strut, they'll condemn and slander as usual. But they're not convinced by their own loud talk. You're convincing them by your good life.

Now at last, it says, they'll be forced to glorify God in the day of visitation. Now, translators don't know which of two things is meant here, and I don't know either. I'll give you both. Whether he means by the day of visitation, the time of trouble on earth, or whether he means the day of judgment when the Lord visits, this men's sins upon themselves, I don't know. I don't claim to know. I don't think it can be discovered. What Peter had in his mind, I don't know. But he may have had both or either.

So, the very person that's against you in the day of his trouble will be forced to glorify God for you. I don't know whether that could mean the day of judgment or not. I rather think it may mean the day of trouble as when poor Job was visited with his tribulation, and others have been visited with tribulation.

But now I want to ask you this, strange inconsistency. You have a well-known Christian brother living down the block here, and everybody around about smiles and shrugs and, well, he's a fanatic. He goes to the Alliance Church and spends some time in prayer, and he's a good fellow, but there's something cracked, surely, there. He's a fanatic.

And all up and down the block, there are church people, but no Christians. It's church people. It's church people. One fellow comes out of his place in the morning and starts off to church. He looks like a Stanley steamer because he is giving off fumes as he goes. He's off to church. And another fellow goes off to another church, but nobody's living right. One fellow in the block, if everybody knows how he lives, he gets kidded. But everybody knows how he lives.

Now let somebody suddenly get into a great crisis. Let a critical something happen to somebody in that block. Who do they send for? Always send for the man of God, always. They always send for the man of God. They glorify God in the day of visitation.

You know, brothers and sisters, I've said before, there's a whole lot to be said in favor of just living things down. Just stay around and don't get impatient. And if you just live right long enough in your block, you'll get slandered a little. But when trouble comes, you'll get called in. It's always so.

So if you just keep right on living, friend, it's, I admit it isn't, this kind of preaching doesn't make a man popular. People don't come from all over to hear that kind of preaching. They want something right quick.

People go to a doctor and say, doctor, I feel all run down. What do you recommend? One doctor says, well, straighten up, live right, eat the right proper diet, get enough sleep, and in six month’s time you won't know yourself. We shrug him off. Oh, doctor, that sounds like an old country doctor. Don't you have something I can take? I want to get well, I'll feel better tomorrow. So, he patiently gives us pills, which we take, and psychologically we think we're better, and aren’t.

We're impatient, we Americans. And the same with Christianity. Christianity wants, people now want a Christianity in the form of a pill, something that'll work real quick.

No, God says, don't get so anxious. You've got eternity to live in. Just live it out, just wait it out, just sweat it out. Stay around, live right. Let week follow week, and month follow month, and keep right, and keep praying, and you'll win.

But God, I want to win today. Well, but how about the eleventh chapter of Hebrews? Some of those old saints that believed God and died without seeing anything happen much, but they all died in faith. So, God wants you to live in faith, and if you need to, die in faith. You'll win at last, and when you go, you'll leave a sweet fragrance behind you, for they can break, they can shatter the vase if they will, but the scent of the roses will hang around it still.

In your family, you wonder about your family, I wonder about mine, my brother, my sister, my relatives, in-laws, I wonder about them. I don't know much that I can do, but I know one thing, if I live right, and walk before them as I should, I'm putting up an argument they can't successfully confute. And perhaps, if I just live it through, they'll glorify God in the day of visitation.

Now that's what Peter said. All I've done is illustrate it, that's all. I just stayed by what Peter said. May God bless it to your good and mine. Amen.