

“God’s Reputation”

1 Peter 2:11-12

November 19, 2006

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The Eighth Olympiad of modern times was held in Paris, France in July of 1924.

It was a spectacular event that had grown in popularity over the past 30 years.

60,000 people were present representing at least 65 countries.

Runners Eric Liddell and Harold Abrahams were Britain’s best hope in those summer games.

Months earlier Eric had informed the British Olympic Committee that he couldn’t run races on Sunday, which he considered the Christian’s Sabbath.

It turned out that the preliminaries for the 100-meter race in the Olympics, Eric’s best event, were to be held on Sunday.

What had been some pressure on Eric Liddell even before the games now mounted to intense pressure on him to compromise his stand and run the race for himself, for his teammates and for all of Britain.

He must have felt great temptation to suspend his convictions just this one time.

On Sunday as his teammate, Harold Abrahams, lined up to run the 100-meter race, Eric was on the other side of Paris preaching at a Scottish church.

The next day, with Eric watching, Harold won the gold – a feat that no other European accomplished for another 56 years later.

On Wednesday, with the pressure about his faith removed, Eric and Harold ran the 200-meter race; Eric finishing third and Harold sixth.

On Thursday Eric barely qualified for the 400-meter race and on Friday again barely got into the final round.

The finals came with two Americans, one Canadian and two Brits – Guy Butler and Eric Liddell.

As was his custom, Eric went down the row of runners in the their starting blocks, shaking hands and wishing them all well.

When the starting gun sounded, Eric jumped to a 3-meter lead running with that seemingly awkward arms-flailing gait of his.

Everyone expected him to fade quickly; after all the 100-meter was his best distance.

But as competitors drew closer, Eric ran faster.

When he crossed the finish line he had not only beaten the others, he had set a new world record.

It was only later that Eric had the time to look at a piece of paper his trainer had pressed into his hand just before he left for that final race.

Eric now opened it and read, “In the Bible it says, ‘He that honors me, I will honor.’” (*More Stories for the Heart*, Alice Gray (ed.), 94-97)

Eric Liddell not only resisted the temptation to compromise his beliefs for the glory of Olympic gold in the 100-meter race, but he went on to live an exemplary life of service for Christ.

Eric eventually became a missionary and died in a Chinese prison.

Even his harshest critics were unable to deny the good, which he had brought to the world. (*George Guthrie, Hebrews*, 411)

Even 60 years later Eric Liddell’s reputation was observed and honored in the 1981 film “Chariots of Fire” which won the honor of the Academy Awards’ “Best Picture” of the year.

The Apostle Peter wrote, 1 Peter 2:11-12 “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.”

These verses introduce a series of life situations wherein Christians are to exhibit these “good deeds” rather than yielding to “sinful desires:”

- 2:13-17 in relationship to governing authorities

- 2:18-20 in relationship to masters/bosses
- 3:1-7 in marriage
- 3:8-12 in the church – the witness of the “body”
We will look at these in the weeks to come.

But the principle is stated here in verses 11-12 “Abstain from sinful desires... (and) live such good lives...that others may glorify God.”

It is two sides of the one issue – Your reputation.
Maybe more to the point: God’s reputation.

In the verses immediately preceding these, the Apostle Peter describes Christians using some striking words:

1 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 called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God...”

As a result of God’s grace we, who trust in Jesus, are now citizens of a new nation, a new people – we belong to God.

To add to that idea, look at what he calls us next in verse 11 “Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world...”

If we are Christians, we have a new citizenship and our relationship to the world in which we live has changed – we are as aliens and strangers in it.

Peter is not saying they are no longer Roman citizens and by inference that we are no longer American citizens.

He is talking about which world, which culture, which realm most influences our values, thoughts and actions, our lives.

The Bible often speaks of two kingdoms, the kingdom of this world and the kingdom of God.

We presently live in the kingdom of this world but which kingdom has our primary allegiance?

1 John 2:15-17 “Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶ For everything in the world--the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does--comes not from the Father but from the world. ¹⁷ The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.”

It is not that everything in the world is bad – we know better.

There are many good things that God has given us in this world.

John’s not talking about the physical world.

He’s talking about the general propensities of people’s hearts, the way that people will naturally go if left unchanged, the influences and powers that motivate people – the cravings, the lust of the eyes, the boasting pride of life.

Peter called it “sinful desires” or desires influenced by what the world values.

Peter says we are now citizens of a new world, a new kingdom – the kingdom of God.

And as part of a new people, the people of God, our allegiance is to his values and goals rather than to the world’s.

And as a result of your new allegiance, there are two things you will do:

You will abstain from sinful desires **and** you will live such good lives among the pagans (whose allegiance is to themselves and this world) that they will see your good deeds and glorify God.”

What’s God’s reputation when people observe our lives?

Maybe the local newspapers and national media would be telling your story if you were as “high-profile” as Ted Haggard.

Maybe they would be telling our stories, if they could see into our hearts.

Because I had been studying 1 Peter, these verses came immediately to mind when I first heard the news out of Colorado Springs three weeks ago.

Oh, how those sinful desires wage war against our very lives!

In his letter of resignation to the congregation Pastor Ted Haggard wrote,

"I am a deceiver and a liar. There is a part of my life that is so repulsive and dark that I've been warring against it all of my adult life.

For extended periods of time, I would enjoy victory and rejoice in freedom. Then, from time to time, the dirt that I thought was gone would resurface, and I would find myself thinking thoughts and experiencing desires that were contrary to everything I believe and teach.

Through the years, I've sought assistance in a variety of ways, with none of them proving to be effective in me. Then, because of pride, I began deceiving those I love the most because I didn't want to hurt or disappoint them... When I stopped communicating about my problems, the darkness increased and finally dominated me. As a result, I did things that were contrary to everything I believe."

Nov 5, 2006 Ted Haggard New Life Church Colorado Springs, Colorado

The results are the destruction of a man's ministry, life-long embarrassment for him and his family, the questions and doubts raised in countless men and women who had looked to him as a representative of godly service, and the list of destruction goes on.

But maybe the saddest result is the besmirching, the soiling, of God's reputation.

In some quarters there seemed to be a gleefulness at having caught yet another Christian.

"Hypocrites and charlatans is what those Christians are."

A friend of our family's who knows we are evangelicals and whose own Roman Catholic church has been under terrible indictment for months said words he meant to be funny but actually hurt because they were true, "Maybe we should all become Mormons or Hindus."

In other words, "Your faith has the same scandalous reputation as ours."

Can God be embarrassed?

Listen again to Peter's words, 1 Peter 2:11 "Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul."

This translation doesn't do enough justice to those two opening words, "dear friends."

The relationship is stronger than that.

It can also and I think more poignantly be translated, "dearly loved ones."

And then he adds, "I urge you..."

I don't just tell you, I implore you, I wish I could make you.

Have you ever watched a loved one destroying him or herself?

Everything in you wants to keep them from doing so.

You are tempted to forcefully extract them from situations.

You do so with young children but as they grow older you are unable to use brute force; you must appeal to them.

It is heart-breaking when they ignore the appeal and go headlong into what can ruin their lives.

- I watch people go into divorce that way – like Ted Haggard, they are blinded by the desires of the flesh rather than led by the values of the Kingdom of God.
- Students begin to misuse alcohol or other drugs.
- You watch their dress, their music, and their entertainment and you can see where it is headed.

They are taking their cues from this culture rather than from the new culture to which they now belong.

How much is that true of us?

I remember a couple in our church many years ago.

I was asked to counsel them regarding their marriage.

The man spoke much of his wife's lack of passion.

One day after he had surgery, I called and asked to visit him in the hospital and I found him reading a pornographic magazine.

Here was a man who fed his mind on pornography and then complained about his wife's appearance and performance.

What shapes our thinking – the world or God?

What sets our agenda of what is truly most important in life?

Whose tune do we march to? Where's our allegiance?

Is it to just a little more financial security, a little more personal pleasure – the sinful desires characteristic of the world?

Those sinful desires are not just sexual.

God speaks of the insidious and powerful influence of money.

Matthew 19:24 "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.

Luke 12:15 Take heed and beware of all covetousness.

Richard Foster and Jacques Ellul write, "Money has power, spiritual power, to win our hearts." Foster, *Money, Sex and Power*, 27 and Jacques Ellul, *Money and Power*

From the St Louis Post Dispatch just last year:

As the IRS investigates, documents reveal "TV evangelist Joyce Meyer and her family have received millions in salary and benefits from her worldwide ministry in recent years, according to newly released records.

She has a "\$900,000 salary with an additional \$450,000 to her husband.

They have "Free personal use of a corporate jet and luxury cars, a \$2 million home where all bills are paid by the ministry and a separate \$50,000-a-year housing allowance.

The ministry paid \$1.475 million to buy three houses for the three Meyer children.

And (they have) an additional \$790,000 fund to be used at their discretion for bonuses to "executive management."

Can God be embarrassed?

Our love of money may not be as egregious as the Meyer's but it may still be a greater influence on our thoughts and actions than God's kingdom is.

Jesus said, Luke 16:13 "You cannot serve God and money.

He went on to say, Luke 12:33 Sell your possessions and give alms.

Luke 6:30 Give to everyone who begs from you, and of him who takes away your goods do not ask them again."

Jesus' words frighten us but his desire is for us to be freed from those sinful desires that wage war against the soul.

What has the larger influence on your heart, God or money?

A Native American was in downtown New York with a friend when he said suddenly, "I hear a cricket."

The friend thought it was impossible to hear a cricket in the midst of all the traffic and pedestrian noise.

But the Indian insisted and finally, walking to a street-side planter, he poked around until he found the cricket.

His friend was astonished but the Indian said, "It simply depends on what you are listening for."

At that he took several pieces of change from his pocket and dropped them on the sidewalk.

Every head within 20 feet turned.

"You see what I mean?" he said, "It all depends on what you're listening for." Tim Hansel

in Alice Gray, *More Stories for the Heart*, 99)

Does your heart hear God or money?

1 Peter 2:11-12 "Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul.

But Peter goes on to speak to the other side of the issue: 1 Peter 2:12 "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."

When Peter refers to others as “pagans,” he is not necessarily speaking disparagingly of them.

The word here translated “pagans” is the same word elsewhere translated “peoples” or “nations.”

Peter is simply describing all those who are not, or not yet, part of the new people of God.

He is saying, I want you to live your lives in such a way that, among outsiders, God’s reputation is upheld.

That “they may see your good deeds.” “Seeing is more than just glancing or even just briefly noting.

It is to “observe.”

I think it implies observation over a long period of time.

As an unbeliever studies our lives, what can they rightly conclude?

In chapter 1:17 we are asked to consider how **God** sees us: “Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear.”

Using the same words for “living your lives,” here in 2:12 we are to consider how **others** see us.

Billy Graham, in contrast to too many others, has maintained a good reputation for himself and his God through over 60 years of public ministry.

Again, in contrast to those who have in the past or even now are yielding to sinful desires and waging war on their own souls, Mr. Graham early on saw the destructive power of those desires and choose to abstain from them.

Early in his ministry as an evangelist he did what other traveling preachers did.

After the people had taken an offering for him and his ministry, he would take the offering with him and use it for expenses and salary.

As I recall it, one morning he saw a newspaper article about his meeting the night before and there was a picture with the article.

The picture was of Graham getting into his car with a bag containing the offering.

Then and there, he determined he would never take another penny from his meetings.

A local committee would take the offerings and pay the expenses and he would keep completely out of it – God’s reputation was on the line.

He was also wise enough, early enough, to realize the seductive power of sex.

He determined that he would never travel without his wife or a male friend.

In every hotel where he stayed without his wife, he arranged it so that no one could get to him or he to anyone else without having to go through the room of one of his male staff members.

He built in protections against others and against his own sinful desires because God’s reputation was on the line.

What about you and me?

Through us, what is God’s reputation in our own homes, in our neighborhoods, at our work and among others?

Avoidance of sin is only part of the equation.

Even living good lives is not merely doing the acceptable Christian things: reading Bible, praying, attending church, and giving to charity and missions.

The other part of the equation is goodness toward others in our business dealings, in our entertainment, our vocations, and in all the relationships of life.

What Peter wants for these deeply loved friends “is a heart focused on God, a behavior focused on love and obedience, and a lifestyle impeccable in the sight of non-Christians.” McKnight,

I close with an illustration that is on going.

About a year ago, Barbara and I, along with 18 others in the extended family, were finally able to sell a small piece of farmland in Minnesota.

One of those family members, who is not a realtor, nonetheless offered to oversee the sale on behalf of all of us.

Because it would take him quite a bit of time, he asked if EACH of the rest of us would give him an honorarium for his work; and he emphasized it was strictly voluntary.

When the sale was finalized, Barbara and I wrote to him thanking him for his work on behalf of all of us and included a check for \$2500.

That amount, more or less, times 18 family members meant an honorarium of \$45,000.

I thought that was rather generous for his non-professional services to us.

About a month later, we received a letter from him in which he returned our check and asked again for \$5500.

I wrote back reminding him that he had repeatedly said that any honorarium was strictly voluntary and I offered to send the \$2500 to him again, if he wanted it.

Two months passed and just this week we received another letter, again demanding \$5500.

I don't know about you, but to us an additional \$3,000 is a lot of money.

- And given the time the man spent, I think the honorarium was more than fair – even generous.
- His curt, demand for more, strikes us as miserly and greedy.
- We really need that money!

Assuming I've told the story truthfully, and I have, what would **you** do?

Oh, did I mention he's not a Christian?

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