

1 & 2 Peter Chapter 4 Social and Civil Duties of the Christian Life

by A.B. Simpson

The sermon emphasizes the importance of living a life of submission, courtesy, and service to others, recognizing the value of every human soul and seeking to win others to higher things for the Lord's sake.

Scripture: 1 Peter 2:13

Topics: "Christian Conduct", "Social Responsibilities"

Description

A.B. Simpson emphasizes the social and civil duties of Christians as outlined in 1 and 2 Peter, urging believers to honor all people, submit to governing authorities, and embody Christ-like behavior in all relationships. He highlights the importance of recognizing the inherent value in every individual, advocating for kindness and respect in social interactions, and fulfilling civic responsibilities for the Lord's sake. Simpson also addresses the roles of servants, wives, and husbands, encouraging mutual respect and love within these relationships, and concludes with a call to live out one's faith in every aspect of life, reflecting Christ's love and grace.

Transcript

"Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake; whether it be to the king, as supreme; Or unto governors as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well." "Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king." (1 Peter 2:13, 14, 17.)

The apostle here calls our attention to the duties of the Christian in all the various relationships of life. 1. As men. "Honor all men." (1 Peter 2:17.). Peter had a great deal of human nature in him, and human nature is a very good thing to have if we have the divine nature, too. "Simon, son of Jona," as the Lord often called him, was a real man and had every cord of human feeling and sympathy vibrant. It cost him a great deal to be so human; but when a human heart is divinely sanctified, it is a great storehouse of power. So Peter looks at all men as men. He sweeps the larger circle of the race, and reminds us that in every human being there is something of infinite value, something that God appreciates, something that brought Christ all the way from heaven to die, and something that we can find in every soul and make it a point of contact to better things. It was of this the Scotch poet sang so much better than he lived when he said:

"The rank is but the guinea's stamp,

The man's the gowd (gold) for a' that."

It was this that Jesus sought and found when He reached the woman at the well through her heart, and even saw in the little Jew in the sycamore tree something worth saving and transforming into heavenly gold. God help us to see the value of a human soul, and to be able to touch it. It was Lord Shaftsbury who once slapped on the shoulder a poor drunken fellow just getting over a terrible temptation and said, "John, by the grace of God, we'll make a man out of you yet," and that touch of a human hand was never forgotten. The poor drunkard lived to be a man of God and a blessing to his fellow men. Over in Indiana there was a woman who had been the terror of her town, and even in the penitentiary she had to be confined and bound with chains. Nobody had ever been able to approach her. One day a quiet Quakeress called at the prison and asked to speak to her; and as the manacled criminal was brought in with scowling and cursing lips, she simply stepped up to her, and saying with unobtrusive kindness the two little words "My sister," she kissed her on both cheeks. The woman staggered as if struck. She tried for a moment to resume her old violent manner, and then burst into tears, saying that it was her first pure kiss since her mother died, and from that hour she was a changed woman. God help us to "honor all men," and by His grace to find the angel in the roughest block of marble.

2. As citizens. "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme, or unto governors," etc. (1 Peter 2: 13.) Peter had his lesson on the subject of civil government that day in Capernaum when the natural Simon rose in irritation against the tax collector, and the Lord so graciously supplied the money and shared the burden with Peter as he uttered that beautiful phrase, "For me and you." No true Christian can be an anarchist. While there is an extreme of spread-eagle patriotism, there is also a middle ground of Christian loyalty which recognizes the powers that be as ordained of God, and even when they are not altogether as they should be, submits and supports "for the Lord's sake." Especially in a country like the United States, and to a great extent even under limited monarchies, is the individual Christian responsible for his part in good government; for if the people be the kings and their elective voice determines the quality of the government, surely no sincere Christian can be indifferent or negligent concerning his civic duties.

3. As members of society. "Finally, be you all of one mind having compassion one of another, love as brethren, ... be pitiful, be courteous: Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing; but contrariwise blessing; knowing that you are there unto called, that you should inherit a blessing. For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile: Let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and pursue it." (1 Peter 3: 8-11.)

Here we have a fine picture of the good manners of the child of God. There is nothing among the things of secondary importance more attractive than social grace, refinement of manners, and the spirit of deportment of a true lady or gentleman. The Christian should always be a gentleman. The spirit of Christ will lift the commonest life to a higher plane of culture, and you can tell immediately by the dress and the deportment of the new convert that he has come into the society of higher beings. The lack of this is very sad and very hurtful to the cause of Christ. Fenelon was so much of a gentleman that one of the courtly infidels of England upon leaving his house, said that if he had stayed much longer he would have been compelled by the charm of the French divine to become a Christian. On the other hand, by our brusqueness how much we dishonor our Master, and repel hearts that would have sought Him!

The spirit of Christ will invariably show itself on the railroad train, in the church aisle, in the little courtesies of the home, in a thousand minute touches which together constitute a great part of the experience of

everyday life. These things are not matters of temperament or education. They can be cultivated until they become the habit of our life. There is a little tract entitled "The Girl for Whom Nobody Cared." She was good in her way and had no serious faults of character or conduct, but rather prided herself on her independence, met her friends with a careless nod, and never wasted words in social amenities and what she was pleased to consider empty forms. The result was that in due time she became thoroughly disliked, and people avoided her as much as she had avoided them. Of course, it became extremely embarrassing to her when she really discovered it, and she had a good cry and an earnest conference with her sensible aunt. The result was that she took some good advice and resolved from that time to study her manners as well as her intentions, and deliberately to plan to say or do some courteous thing to everybody she met. The first person was a garrulous neighbor of whom she was always particularly tired. But this morning she set to work on her with her new lesson. "How is Jimmy?" she asked. And the old lady was delighted to tell her how Jimmy had just got over the measles and a dozen little tiresome things that made the mother's face glow with pleasure to find a willing listener, and the effect was contagious. The young lady herself became strangely interested in the pleasure she had so easily given to the other. And so the first lesson was a complete success. A little farther on she met Sissy, the daughter of the washerwoman, whom she was used to pass with a very curt nod as quite beneath her. But now there was a gracious smile, a moment's pause, and a kind word of thanks to Sissy for having brought the laundry so promptly the day before, and greatly accommodated her as she had a social engagement for which she needed her clean dress. Before long she had exhausted all subjects except the weather, but even a kindly remark about the weather, especially in good weather, is more cheerful than a silent nod; and so when she returned home her face was shining and her day had been a great success. It was not long before the girl that nobody liked was the girl that everybody liked, and she had found inexpensive kindness more precious than gold.

A good deal of this has to do with faults of the tongue, and so Peter is as decided as James in reminding us that if we would have good health, long life, and God's blessing, we must keep our tongue from evil and our lips from speaking guile. This, too, can be studied if we habitually remember the Psalmist's prayer, "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips." In this way many of the weakest and most foolish of God's children have learned to be so guarded that their very silence speaks for Christ and a life of victory as no words could. Let us remember that we are called to dispense blessing. This is our occupation to scatter sunshine and make others glad.

An old Quaker was once visited by a garrulous neighbor who complained that he had the worst servants in the world, and everybody seemed to conspire to make him miserable. "My dear friend," said the Quaker, "let me advise you to oil yourself a little." "What do you mean?" said the rather irritated old gentleman. "Well," said the Quaker, "I had a door in my house some time ago that was always creaking on its hinges, and I found that everybody avoided it; and although it was the nearest way to most of the rooms yet they went round some other way. So I just got some oil, and after a few applications it opened and shut without a creak or a jar, and now everybody just goes to that door and uses the old passage. Just oil yourself a little with the oil of kindness. Occasionally praise your servants for something they do well. Encourage your children more than you scold them, and you will be surprised to find that a little sunshine will wear out a lot of fog, and a little molasses is better than a great deal of vinegar." Be courteous.

4. As servants. "Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward." (1 Peter 2: 18.) We have already seen that the condition of a Roman slave was not only much worse than that of a modern servant, but really very much worse than anything we know in

connection with modern slavery. And yet to these selfish, brutal, cruel masters and mistresses, the Christian slave was to be obedient, and by his conduct seek to win them to higher things. If they were in error, as servants sometimes are, and were buffeted for it, they were to take it patiently. And there is no higher quality in man or woman than to be able to make an apology with humility and yet with dignity. But if they were innocent, how much more might they endure their wrong and wait for God's vindication.

In the present day almost every position in life involves the idea of service, and more or less of subjection to a higher authority. Let us render this for Christ's sake, even when it is not due for the sake of the person immediately concerned. How it exalts our menial toil to realize that we are working for Him, and that some day He will thank us and reward us before the universe! In such a service nothing is menial or degrading. The motive glorifies the deed. There is no smaller man in the world than he who is ashamed of manual labor or honorable employment. In a book of "The Life of Washington" it is said that riding by among his encampments in military undress, he found a petty officer ordering a small squad of men to change the position of a heavy gun which seemed beyond their strength, while he was coolly looking on, giving orders but not touching the heavy burden himself. The general, unrecognized by the officer or men, sprang from his horse, and putting his shoulder to the wheel soon helped them to lift the heavy load and place the gun in position. Then he turned to the petty officer and asked him why he wasn't helping. "Why," said he, "I'm a corporal." "Then, Mr. Corporal," said he, "the next time you have a load too heavy for your men and want assistance just send for the commanding officer to come and help you. I bid you good morning," and the General withdrew, leaving the Corporal discomfited and the men infinitely amused. Let us take up our burdens with new heart and bear them for Him, who, like us, was a Man of sorrow and toil, and even in heaven is not thinking of His own ease or self-indulgence, but as our girded Priest ever living to make intercession for us.

5. As wives and husbands. "Likewise, you wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; while they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear. Whose adorning . . . let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price." (1 Pet. 3: 1-4.) If the position of a servant was extremely trying in ancient Rome, much more difficult and confused was the position of a wife, and the state of society with regard to marriage. Woman was by universal consent regarded as the inferior of man, and the wife of a heathen was subject to much humiliation and wrong. But the apostle tells the Christian wives not to desert their unworthy husbands, but so to live as to win them for God. Many a wife has done this. The Scriptures discountenance the marriage of Christian women to ungodly men, yet it often happens that both are unsaved at the time of marriage; and when the wife becomes a follower of Christ, under these circumstances there are the strongest reasons for expecting the grace of God to interpose for the salvation of her husband. And even if she has made the mistake of marrying against the Word of God, all the more should she repair her wrong by endeavoring to bring her husband to Christ.

The secret of woman's most supreme and sweetest attraction is here in a most beautiful phrase. Her ornament is not to be outward fashion and display, but a meek and quiet spirit, the beauty of the hidden man of the heart, the loveliness of character, gentleness, and love. This is woman's kingdom, and there is no doubt that many a man would be a better man if he had a different wife. Dear sisters, recognize your calling and rise to your high scepter and noble ministry. While marriage is not the lot of every woman, yet if God gives to woman a true and happy marriage, there is no higher vocation, there is no sweeter or nobler task than to live to be the blessing and crown of another life of which hers is the inspiration and the

benediction. "My wife has been an open book to me," said an infidel who had read all other books in vain, and who yielded his heart to Christ because the beautiful life that was linked with his compelled his confidence and won his heart.

And the husband, too, has his reciprocal responsibilities. "Likewise, you husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honor unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered." (1 Peter 3: 7.) The phrase "according to knowledge" seems to require of the husband an intelligent understanding of the partner of his life, a thoughtful love that recognizes her disabilities and difficulties as the weaker vessel, and finds his highest honor in honoring her. The tendency of modern social life is disintegrating the home. The husband finds his substitute in his club, and the wife follows with her receptions and the program of social calls, and, of course, it is his fault as much as hers. A wise wife uttered a well merited reproof of this state of things one day when she asked her husband to permit her to make an appointment for some evening to meet a mutual friend. But every evening was occupied by him with some society. On Thursday night it was the Odd Fellows' Society, on Friday night it was the Foresters' Society, on Saturday night it was the Masonic Society, and on Sunday night it was the Church Society. At last his wife gave him a keen look and said, "My dear, I think in the multitude of your societies you have forgotten one." "What one is that?" he said. "Why," said she, "it is your wife's society."

But the real secret of a true Christian home life is given us by the apostle's reference to united prayer. "Walk together," he says, "as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered." This is the spark of celestial fire that will keep the altar of home from growing cold and love from dying out in the ashes of bitterness. How many of you fathers and husbands are keeping up the family altar? How many of you are praying every day with your wife? Is not this the telltale secret of all your troubles? Let us go back to Bethel and dwell there, and God will love and bless the dwellings of Jacob as well as the tabernacles of Zion.

Dr. Norman McLeod tells of a father that burst into his study one day with the bitter cry that his daughter had died that morning; and, added the father, "I hope she has gone to be with Christ, but if she has, she has gone to tell that never in all her life did she hear a prayer in her father's house."

7. As Christian brethren. "Love as brethren." (1 Peter 3: 8.) "Use hospitality one to another." (1 Peter 4:9.) "Yes, all of you be subject one to another." (1 Peter 5: 5.) "As every man has received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." (1 Peter 4: 10.) These are some of the social obligations of the disciples of Christ. Space will not allow us to enlarge upon them now, but the keynote of all is the same that has rung through all other relationships, "For the Lord's Sake." This will make you a faithful servant to the worst of masters, a loving wife to the man that you could not love for his own sake, a genial and courteous friend, that you may the better represent your Lord and attract others to Him, a subject and a citizen for Christ, and a Christian worker adjusted to your brethren, fitted into your place, and so "Whatsoever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus." (Col. 3:17.) Lord, shed this supernal light on every common thing until it shall shine in the light of God like the glory which the sun reflects from the meanest bit of broken glass.

"So let your works and actions shine

To show the doctrine all divine."

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