

PAST AND PRESENT

BY B. G. ECHOLS

The conduct of the Gentiles was often related to their religion which often involved immorality. Just being religious is inadequate. "For the time past may suffice to have wrought the desire of the Gentiles, and to have walked in lasciviousness, lusts, winebibbings, revellings, carousings, and abominable idolatries" (1 Peter 4:3). The past is enough of that. Thankfully, the past is past. It is terminated and closed. "What fruit then had ye at that time in the things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of these things is death" (Rom. 6:21). Let God have the rest of your life. Look back on the wasted years and give more precious moments to serve God.

More than ever we need to practice self-control. A Christian's life is divided into two parts: the time past doing the will of the Gentiles; and now, doing the will of God. "And this, knowing the season, that already it is time for you to awake out of sleep: for now is salvation nearer to us than when we first believed. The night is far spent, and the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light" (Rom. 13:11,12). As Christians we need to ask ourselves a very serious question. Do national customs and contemporary morals determine our conduct in decisive ways, or is our behavior governed by Jesus Christ regardless of what society says? More and more the name "Christian" is being outmoded in our culture. Therefore we need to take seriously the N.T. teaching on the line of demarcation between the community of the redeemed and the society of the nation. We have been called out.

"Walked" denotes a manner of life. These sins were especially rampant among the luxurious Asiatic lands, but most places in our country can probably match the worst scenes of Ephesus or Corinth. "Lasciviousness" is unbridled conduct. It describes one who acknowledges no restraint. It is outward. "Lusts" are more inward. Lust has been described as "appetite run wild." Sensual impurity is one part of lust. "Winebibbing" is an insatiable desire for strong drink. "Revellings" are drunken songs

and frolicking in the streets. You see this now quite frequently at such things as bowl games, the world series, Mardi Gras, New Year's celebrations, graduating parties, etc. "Carousings" are drinking parties. Many of these were connected with idolatry. Isn't there still a lot of alcohol consumed by religious pagans on heathen holidays such as Christmas, Easter, etc.? "Abominable idolatries" refers, not just to the sin of idolatry, but also to the numerous lascivious practices connected with it.

The first three sins listed are primarily personal while the last three are more social. All are common to this world of unredeemed people. Alcohol consumption is closely connected to these. There are some bad men who do not use alcohol, but most crimes would not be committed except under its influence and/or the influence of other mind altering drugs. In this verse there is a difference between drinking and drunkenness, but both are wrong. This is made clearer in other translations. "Drunkenness, riot, and tippling, and the forbidden worship of idols" (The New English Bible). "Drunkenness, revelry, hard drinking and profane idolatry" (The Twentieth Century New Testament). "Getting drunk, wild parties, drinking bouts, and worship of idols" (Living Letters, The Paraphrased Epistles).

"Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them into the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you" (1 Peter 4:4). Christians' conduct bewilders former companions. It is a novelty. This may give Christians an opportunity to explain. The supreme concern of Christians should not be what man thinks, but what God thinks. The spectacle of Christians steadfastly refusing to share in the lower life, which is the only life of so many, is getting to be more and more joked about for it is getting more and more rare in our culture. The total abstainer from alcoholic intoxicants is called a faddist, narrow-minded, and so on. You may know a child of God because Satan's servants make fun of him.

The high standards of Christ must constantly battle against the evils of a pagan society, espe-

cially when religion and morality are not related. That was true then, and is true now. Many have "religion," but are immoral. "Excess of riot" suggests two interpretations. They will squander all they have: wealth, family, and health, to indulge in their passions. Or, there is no longer any hope of their being saved from eternal ruin. There is no limit to the evils that are done. "And be not drunken with wine, wherein is riot, but be filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18). The idea of loss of control seems evident. It is a life of abandon. "Let yourself go" is the cry of the times. To "run" suggests an eagerness for sin, of people hastening out of the house to join in the evil festivals of idolatry.

Why do they speak evil when you refuse to join them? They may say, "You once did all the things we do." That may be true, but we have changed! They may realize how ruinous their practices are, but have no incentive to stop. Your refusal also casts a reflection of judgment. There are two strong temptations which cause this situation to be dangerous to us. Our neighbors desire to have us like them, and we often desire to be like our neighbors. Thus the great god of things-as-they-are lures us with his spells and snares. They are so surprised by your conduct that they speak evil of you. Even the best Christians cannot escape.

SEVEN WAYS TO HONOR FATHER AND MOTHER:

1. By Obedience. (Col. 3:20; Rom. 1:28-32; Lev. 20:9; 2 Tim. 3:5-11; Eph. 6:1; Acts 5:29)
2. By Helpfulness and Care. (Prov. 10:5; Matt. 15:3-7a; 1 Tim. 5:4, 8)
3. By showing Them Respect. (Lev. 19:3; 20:9; Prov. 30:17).
4. By Expressing Thanksgiving to Them. (1 Thess. 5:18; Col. 3:17)
5. By Heeding Their Counsel. (Prov 1:6-9)
6. By Living An Honorable Life Yourself. (Prov. 29:15)
7. By Loving Them. (1 John 4:19)

■ Part of a sermon outline by Phil Arnold

The word "you" was added by the translators. Without it, it is possible to think they speak evil of Christ and His teaching which led to such changes. The usual idea, however, is slander of people. The fact that some who live such lives quit and no longer run that way shows the power of the gospel and is an encouragement to Christians to keep on preaching.

Those who belittle Christians are those "who shall give account to him that is ready to judge the living and the dead" (1 Pet. 4:5). "Ready" expresses certainty rather than nearness. The Judge is Christ (Acts 17:31). The living and dead refer to the totality of humanity, past and present. Judgment is universal (2 Cor. 5:10). No one will escape.

If we have an opportunity to speak to former acquaintances, we should let them know that judgment is to come. Judgment will vindicate the wisdom of sowing to the spirit and the fallacy of sowing to the flesh. One reaps corruption; the other eternal life. "For unto this end was the gospel preached even to the dead, that they might be judged indeed according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit" (1 Pet. 4:6).

Peter cannot mean the gospel was preached to the physically dead after they died. The reference can be to those Christians who are now dead and who died in Christ. Thus the dead are the same as in the previous verse. He is writing to Christians facing persecution. Some have already died in the faith. It is an encouragement to know they still live unto God. The saints who have died were judged by men as unworthy of their fellowship, but they live unto God. Thus if we are rejected by men because of our faith, we can still live unto God. The gospel brings to the minds of living men the fact of judgment and condemnation to the guilty. Hopefully they will repent. The fact that some have heard and refused it makes their condemnation even more justifiable.

Obedience to the gospel lifts life from a solely selfish, fleshly purpose to a spiritual. This is why the gospel was preached. Christians live in two realms with the spiritual being triumphant. The lost live in the fleshly realm alone. The flesh may suffer in consequence of obeying the gospel, but the spirit will live. With that hope, we can endure any trial and suffering.