

Introduction

I was reading about a man who compiled a list of embarrassing relatives, which got me to thinking. What if God compiled a list of embarrassing Christians? Would you and I be on it? In one sense I hope not. In another sense, I hope so. And that's what I'm going to preach about today – being embarrassments **to** and **for** God. Turn to the passage I read earlier about that, 1 Peter 2:11-18.

Christians Are a Reflection on God

Let's begin with verse 12 and the word, "***Gentiles.***" The equivalent for us today is non-Christians. I've discovered in my own life experience that there are two basic kinds of non-Christians. There are the hostile and the unconvinced. The hostile attack God and His friends. The unconvinced don't attack them but do have sincere questions about how genuine and good they are.

Either way, almost all non-Christians do the same thing. According to Peter in verse 12, they observe Christians. That means they watch what the Christians they know say and do and then judge God and all Christians on the basis of that.

I once clerked for a common pleas judge who was a non-Christian. He didn't even have a Christian background in fact. He told me one day that he almost didn't hire me. I asked why and he explained it, "***Because I knew from your resume that you were a Christian and Christians don't work very hard.***" That's the idea he had, that Christians don't work very hard.

It doesn't take a genius to figure out where he got it – from some lazy Christian he worked with or observed. The point is that non-Christians observe what the Christians they know say and do and then judge God and all Christians on the basis of that.

But that's understandable isn't it? Think about it. The word "Christians" connotes those who are like Christ. When we claim that

we're Christians, therefore, we're claiming that we're like Christ. So non-Christians just naturally and, in their minds, logically assume that Christ and other Christians are like we are.

The bottom line is the things we say and do as Christians reflect on God. We need to be consciously aware of that as we move through our everyday lives. The things we say and do reflect on God. They do so in one of two ways, each of which I want to discuss.

Embarrass God

First, they can reflect on Him poorly and when they do, He's embarrassed.

Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard was an outspoken critic of 19th century middle class Christianity. One day, shocked parishioners told him that teenagers had used the sanctuary of their church for a dance. To which he replied, ***"Using the sanctuary for a dance on Saturday night is not half as bad as using it to make a fool out of God on Sunday morning."***

Notice what Kierkegaard assumed – that we can make a fool out of God, that we can embarrass Him. Is that true? It clearly is in this sense. We can say and do things that make Him and His way seem ridiculous and stupid to others; that make becoming a Christian seem like an idiotic thing to do.

Just listen to and look at some of the bad things that the Christians around you say and do. Imagine how you'd feel if people were judging you on the basis of those things. You'd be embarrassed and God, in His own way, is too.

John Denver starred in a movie years ago titled *Oh, God!* I didn't see it but I did read about a scene in it. Denver plays a young man who keeps getting messages from God that he's supposed to relate to others. In one scene, God sends him to hear an evangelistic preacher who embodies the worst of evangelistic preachers. He eventually interrupts this preacher in the middle of his sermon and tells him that God has a

special message just for him. The egocentric preacher, thinking it's something flattering and good, wants everyone to hear it. So he stops the service and announces to the congregation, ***"This young man has come with a message from God!"*** On the spot now, Denver's character has to say what God sent him to say. So he looks at the preacher and says, ***"God wants you to shut up because you're embarrassing Him."***

I wonder how many times that God has felt like saying that to you and me, ***"Shut up, stop it, because you're embarrassing Me."*** Which is exactly what we should do when we are. Shut up or stop it!

Glorify God

There's a second way the things we say and do can reflect on God. They can reflect on Him well and when they do, He is glorified.

Look at Peter's command in verse 12, ***"Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles."*** The Greek word translated "excellent" is the same word translated "good" in Matthew 5:16. Jesus says there, ***"Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."***

Jesus and Peter are calling us to say and do things that are good. When they say "good," they're talking about kingdom goodness. Say and do things that a person with a kingdom heart, a heart like that of Jesus, would say and do. Peter enumerates some of those things in verses 13-18: submit to and honor leaders, honor everyone, love brothers and sisters in Christ, fear God, and respect masters. Jesus enumerates others in Matthew 5-7: value people, be sexually pure, go the extra mile with people, live simply, and more.

Now, notice what happens when we say and do things that are excellent or good. Jesus says in Matthew 5:16 that non-Christians will ***"glorify your Father who is in heaven."*** Peter says the very same thing in verse 12 that non-Christians will ***"glorify God."*** That's what happens when we say and do excellent things. We don't embarrass God; we glorify Him. That means we make Him and His way seem wonderful,

desirable, to others. We make becoming a Christian seem like the best thing in the world to do.

In his book *A Modern Epiphany*, Cecil Northcott tells about a discussion that took place among a group of Christian young people from all over the world. They had gathered for an international conference and one night sat by a campfire discussing various ways of winning people to Jesus. The group eventually turned to an African girl named Maria who hadn't said anything. They asked her what they did in her country, to which she replied, **"Oh, we don't have missions or give pamphlets away. We just send one or two Christian families to live and work in a village, and when people see what Christians are like, they want to become Christians too."**

That is certainly consistent with Matthew 5:16 and 1 Peter 2:12 isn't it? Christians living kingdom lives make God and His way seem wonderful, desirable, to others. It makes becoming a Christian seem like the best thing in the world to do. So, live kingdom lives.

I can't overstate the significance of this. Non-Christians are being bombarded with a whole host of conflicting philosophies and religions including Christianity. Why should they choose Christianity over all the rest. What evidence is there that God and His way are truer and better than all the rest? There are two basic answers to that. One of those is the way Christians live. When they have kingdom goodness and joy in their lives, they are living proof that God and His way are superior.

The message then is a clear one. The things we say and do reflect either poorly or well on God. Non-Christians are observing the things we say and do. They're also judging Him on the basis of those things. So let's not embarrass Him by the things we say and do. Let's glorify Him instead.

Embarrassments for God

But there's another side to being embarrassed that Peter brings up. Notice what he calls Christians in verse 11. He says that we are

"aliens" and "strangers" in the world. The Greek word that is translated "aliens" describes people who don't have any legal status or rights in the place they live. The word translated "strangers" describes people who are living in a place temporarily. The message is this. The world, secular society, isn't the home of Christians. The kingdom of heaven is.

That implies several things, one of which is this. Christians march to the beat of a different drummer. They really do. The world is flying upside down. They're flying right side up. They think, feel, and act, therefore, in ways the world often doesn't appreciate or understand, in ways it finds offensive or odd. The world thought Jesus was an embarrassment! It will often think you and I are too if we follow Him!

I've already talked this morning about being embarrassments *to* God, turning people off because of the bad things that we say and do. But what I'm talking about now is being embarrassments *for* God, turning people off because we think, feel, and act like Jesus.

I know that what I just said about that is an unpopular message today. It runs against the grain of what evangelicals want to preach and hear. What they want to preach and hear is that everyone will love us and everything will go well for us in the world if we follow Jesus.

America's most popular televangelist epitomizes what I mean. He's gained a vast following by promising people just that. In a sermon I heard him preach, for instance, he challenged us to be favor-minded. As we move through our day, concentrate on and believe that God will bless us with good things. If we're favor minded like that, he said, then we'll find favor - not only with God but people as well. They'll be so kindly disposed to us that they'll treat us in positive ways they wouldn't others. They'll bend the rules for us, he said, and gave examples, like giving us promotions at work over those who are more deserving of it than we are.

Let me ask you two questions. Do people like hearing that? Yes, they do. 15,000 people applauded in fact when he said it. But is it true? No, it isn't.

Listen to what Tony Campolo says instead in his book *Growing Up in*

American. He writes about graduates from a Christian college: **“None of the established social institutions would want graduates from this school if they were Christlike persons. Businesses would be threatened by graduates who challenged their unethical practices. The medical profession would not welcome graduates who criticized the exorbitant fees that make medical care inaccessible to many people. Many law firms would not be attracted to graduates who were interested only in delivering justice. In short, institutions and their leaders would not be favorably disposed to a host of young Christians who, like their predecessors in the early church, had earned the reputation of being people who ‘turned the world upside down’ (Acts 17:6).”**

He’s right. I know that from my own legal experience and the experience of others, like an accountant, physician, and attorney I know, all of whom follow Jesus. The accountant challenged three unethical practices of the company he worked for and was fired for it. The physician charged his patients what they could afford to pay and alienated the Barberton medical community as a result. And the attorney refused to mislead and over-bill clients as a senior partner demanded and was passed up for partner and forced to quit because he did. Those are three competent and conscientious professionals who did what they did well and like Jesus would. But the world couldn’t stand them for it.

They are aliens and strangers in the world and so should we be. We must have the courage to think, feel, and act like Jesus, even if the people around us think we’re foolish, offensive, or odd if we do.

Conclusion

I’d sum up God’s challenge to us in closing this way. First, may your everyday behavior reflect not poorly but well on God. And second, may you think, feel, and act like Jesus even when the world thinks you’re foolish, offensive, or odd if you do. Don’t make God’s “Embarrassments **to** Me” list. Do make His “Embarrassments **for** Me” list.