

EXPOSITION OF I PETER

Message #8

I Peter 2:11-12

Every now and then we learn of some pastor or youth minister who gets caught in some lustful activity that is evil and often illegal. When this happens, the lost world gets another good laugh at Christianity. It breaks my heart to learn that someone who supposedly knows the Lord and serves the Lord falls into sin. The sin not only affects the one who did it, but it also affects the entire family of God.

The Roman world of the first century was an evil and lust crazed world. The emperors of Rome were known for their godless, immoral ways. When Peter wrote I Peter, Nero was emperor who became emperor before he was 17. He became a power crazed maniac. He was very progressive and very liberal and very immoral. If anyone crossed him he had them killed. He lived a “self-indulgent life.”

Michael Grant, in his book *The Twelve Caesars* writes: “He was said to have gone to bed not only with perfectly normal, good-looking young women, but also with his mother Agrippina, with men older than himself, with eunuchs and with young boys including Britannicus, while graffiti on the walls of Pompeii include an inscription by a male prostitute alleging that he personally had served Nero’s lust on four occasions” (p. 160).

For the nonbeliever, the world was nothing more than a lust filled physical playground, but for the believer the world is a spiritual battleground. We are in civil war with ourselves and God wants us to win this war. For those who know the Lord, the name of Jesus Christ is on the line and it is absolutely essential that we do not bring reproach to His name. Even in this wretched culture, Christians were still watched and the lost world was looking to see if they could get some dirt on the first century Christian.

Now the Grace gospel means that we have freedom and never have to worry about the condemnatory judgment of God. However, it does not mean we should indulge ourselves in evil and lustful things.

Beginning with **I Peter 2:11** through **I Peter 3:12**, Peter admonishes believers to a practical lifestyle that reflects the grace of God in a heathen world. Here is how you live as an alien or foreigner. If you choose to obey these things you will live in a lifestyle foreign to the world. Peter begins with this admonition:

GOD WANTS HIS PEOPLE TO DEMONSTRATE HIS GRACE BY ABSTAINING . FROM FLESHLY LUSTS THAT WILL WAR AGAINST THEIR SOUL SO THAT OUR LIVES ARE LIVED IN SUCH A WAY THAT WE GLORIFY GOD IN FRONT OF THE LOST WORLD.

It is contextually probable that believers were being falsely accused in this area of lustful activity. Peter brings up in these verses that believers were being slandered. What should we do when you are suffering because of some verbal attack? How do we react when someone makes false allegations against us? How do we prove our innocence? Do we call him a liar? Do we threaten to sue? Do we threaten to punch them in the face? Do we beg them to like us?

What does God want us to do? He wants us to quietly live our lives in a way that reflects His grace and His glory to this lost world.

Now apparently some were making false moral charges against believers in Peter's day. Peter knew the best way to glorify God and stop the false allegations was to live life in such a God-honoring way that it silenced the critics. Years ago I know of a very godly, faithful pastor who was a thorn in the side of those who were in sin in the church. He stirred up a real hornet's nest by preaching the Word and doctrines of God. This group wanted to get something on him, so they actually, illegally, tape-recorded his telephone conversations to try and get some ammunition. They came up empty. His ministry and life and conversations were pure. That is exactly the point Peter is making here. That is exactly the kind of testimony he was after.

We live in a time when if one believer falls, it is said - 'there are Christians for you, they are all the same.' Well we aren't the same and Peter wanted these believers to silence the critics by the way they lived their lives.

Now the text may be broken down into two main parts:

PART #1 – The main admonition to abstain from fleshly lusts. **2:11**

From **verse 11** there are six observations we want to make:

(Observation #1) - This text is addressed to the "beloved" that is to those who are in a right relationship with God. The teaching of this text has no bearing on the lost.

The term "beloved" used here and also in 4:12, means that we are loved at the highest level by God. I love what Dr. Henry Alford said about this, by virtue of the fact that Peter only uses this word twice it adds great weight to the meaning when he uses it (*Alford's Greek Testament*, Vol. 4, p. 349). Peter is addressing us and God is addressing us as one who loves us, not as one who is mad at us.

The term "beloved" is used to describe the special bond that God has with His people. In fact, He used this very term in regard to His own "beloved Son" (Matthew 3:17). In other words, just as Jesus was very special to His Father, so are we. Now Jesus never had to be admonished to abstain from fleshly lusts because He was Holy, but we aren't and we need to be admonished. We are a beloved son of God and God wants us to look like it and act like it.

(Observation #2) - The admonition is an “urge” by Peter, meaning he is coming alongside of us and encouraging us to do something.

The actual Greek word “urge” (παρακαλεω) speaks of coming alongside of us and appealing to us in a very encouraging and inviting way. It is a very strong appeal, but it is also a very positive appeal. By using this word, Peter does not come at God’s people in a lording way, a better than thou way, but in a way that is right alongside us. He is one of us and he is encouraging us to do something.

(Observation #3) - The admonition is based upon the fact that we are aliens and foreigners on earth.

We admire people who are loyal to their homeland country. We expect people to be decent and respectable when they are in another country, but you cannot help but admire people who are always loyal to their country. **God wants us loyal to our own country, which is heaven.**

Our residency status becomes the basis for the appeal. The word “alien” was previously used in 1:1, and refers to one who lives for a while in a place other than the place of real citizenship. One who is an alien does not have the same rights and privileges of the normal citizens. The word “foreigner” (παροικοι) is a new word. It refers to one who lives beside or alongside of the native citizens while not really being a native. What makes this so tricky is that we used to belong to this world prior to God saving us. In one moment our citizenship was changed; we used to be a citizen of the world but now we aren’t.

Peter is saying, ‘look, you are called by God to live alongside native worldly, lost citizens even though you are now really a native of heaven. You don’t belong to this world so don’t act like you do. Reflect God’s grace and reflect your heavenly citizenship while on earth to these worldly people by abstaining from fleshly lusts.’ The natural citizens will do all kinds of things and be involved in all kinds of natural citizen things that should have no connection to you, because you are an alien and a foreigner. **Our primary challenge in life is not to get the lost people to act like saved people; it is to get us saved people not to act like lost people.**

(Observation #4) - The verb abstain (απεχεσθαι) literally means to hold yourself back from or to keep away from or keep your distance from fleshly lusts (Smith, p. 47).

The infinitive is present middle, which means in and of ourselves God wants us to continually keep our distance from fleshly lusts. The responsibility we have is to distance ourselves from the things that appeal to our fleshly lusts. If you have a flesh problem with temper, anger, jealousy, immorality, covetousness, gossip, drunkenness, you have an assignment to distance yourself from the things or the places or the people who feed your flesh problem. One would think with some they have the idea that they are supposed to get as close to these things as they can, but God says avoid these things, keep your distance from these things. Our new Spirit indwelt nature gives us the potential to abstain from the lures of our old flesh nature and its desires. But this abstinence will only come as we yield to the Spirit of God and not our old nature.

(Observation #5) - The lusts are fleshly lusts, which as Reinecker says are “impulses which belong to the lower side of man’s nature” (p. 406).

We need to understand that we have a flesh that is drawn toward fleshly lusts, not away from them. Many of us have tragically known of some Christian who got involved with lustful things and brought shame and disgrace to the name of Jesus Christ. I knew a person who was involved in immoral things multiple times and when I asked him how did this happen, his answer was the pressure of the ministry caused it. No that wasn’t it. His flesh caused it.

The thing that is drawn to lustful immoral things is our flesh, that dark, depraved, sin nature that every believer has. These are called “fleshly” lusts, not “pressure” lusts.

Now the idea of fleshly lusts includes sexual things but not only sexual things. It refers to many things of our depraved and corrupt nature. It can include your pride or your lying. The Apostle Paul gives a list of things in Galatians 5:19-21 which all stem from our lower, sin-flesh nature. There is an entire army of flesh things that are out to attack you. We are to continually keep our distance from these things in this list - immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissension, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing and things of this nature. **When we keep our distance from these kinds of things, we demonstrate the grace of God and the glory of God to a lost world.**

(Observation #6) - The verb “war” is one that refers to a military campaign (James 4:1-2) against your soul.

Your fleshly lusts are your personal enemies. The present tense indicates that these lusts continually in and of themselves wage a military campaign and war against our soul. **The real target of the attack is your own soul.** There is a long-term military campaign that is designed to capture your soul and its primary weapon is your own fleshly lusts. If you are a believer, you are in war and that war will be relentless. What is at stake in the war is your soul. God wants it shining bright for him and your flesh wants just the opposite. **The fleshly lust warfare is out to rob your eternal soul of the glory it should have.**

As we said, you have a civil war on your hands with yourself. The part we play in victory is to keep our distance from those things that excite our flesh, because the real target is not your flesh it is your soul. This is not about harming your body, although you can do that too; it is about harming your soul. The devil will try to convince you that by letting yourself go in fleshly areas you’ll be happy and fulfilled, but what he won’t tell you is you devour and imprison your own soul.

I can absolutely guarantee every person here today of this reality - **when you get to your deathbed moment, the only thing that will concern you is what will happen to your soul.** You will not be thinking about your career or accomplishments or investments or pleasures or lusts, but you will be thinking about your soul, which is just about to leave your body. If you have allowed fleshly lusts to win the war for your soul, you will regret it the moment your soul leaves your body.

PART #2 – The main motivations for abstaining from fleshly lusts. **2:12**

There are basically four reasons why we are urged to abstain from fleshly lusts:

(Reason #1) - This type of behavior is excellent among Gentiles. **2:12a**

The word “excellent” (καλῆν) means that this kind of behavior presents a beautiful outward form of the essence of the grace of God (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 228). Realize it or not, like it or not but we are watched by people. We do make a statement for God by how we live. As we move away from “fleshly lusts” we become more and more of a reflection of what God wants us to reflect to this unsaved world. We become more and more a reflection of a Holy Priest.

(Reason #2) - It is the type of behavior that silences their slander. **2:12b**

Christians were falsely charged as being evildoers who practiced evil things that were even alleged to be criminal. Nero accused Christians of burning down Rome in A.D. 64 and it was that which led him to inflict terrible punishments and cruelties on Christians. Sometimes we are falsely accused but through a consistency of life, we may literally prove the slander to be just that, slander, which is not true. Peter says prove people wrong by your behavior.

I cannot help but be reminded of Daniel. There were high ranking commissioners whose goal was to find something for which they could accuse Daniel. They spied on him and could not find anything in his life that was inconsistent with the Word of God (Daniel 6:4-5).

I personally knew a brother who was falsely accused of being a dictator who always demanded that he get his own way. Nothing was further from the truth. He was a faithful servant of God and by his consistency over time, people came to see that. Consistent behavior proves people wrong.

Robert Leighton of the 1600's said that it is the “Devil's Delight” not only to speak evil against a brother or sister, but to listen to evil speaking against a brother or sister (*Commentary on I Peter*, p. 186). So as believers, we want to be very careful about what we say about one another and about what we listen to about one another. The goal is to silence slander, not promote it.

(Reason #3) - It is the type of behavior that glorifies God. **2:12c**

Our job is not to retreat from the world; it is to glorify God in the world. God wants us here, in the world, living, working, playing as a God-glorifying grace reflector.

God is either glorified by our behavior or He isn't. It is possible for us to live our lives in this sinful, lust crazed world in a way that glorifies God.

(Reason #4) - It is the type of behavior used by God. **2:12d**

The phrase “in a day of visitation” is one that refers to a time in which your behavior will be used as ‘Exhibit A’ by God for the glory of God.

The phrase “day of visitation” was used many times in a variety of ways:

- 1) It was used by Moses to refer to a day in which God personally would give a special blessing to an individual, like the birth of Isaac. Genesis 18:5, 14; 21:1-2.
- 2) It was used by many O.T. writers - Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah - to refer to a day of God’s judgment. Leviticus 18:25; Isaiah 10:3; Jeremiah 8:12; 10:15; 11:23
- 3) It was used by Dr. Luke to refer to a time when Jesus Christ specifically came to this world to offer salvation to Israel and she missed it. Luke 1:68, 78; 19:44
- 4) It is a concept used by John in Revelation to refer to a moment when Jesus Christ actually comes to a church in some judgment capacity. Revelation 2:5, 22-23; 3:3

It seems to me that in the I Peter context, this phrase has a definite reference to our impact on the lost world. It may either mean in the day God’s grace draws people to Himself for salvation, or it may mean in the day God brings His judgment down on those who did not believe on Him, or it may mean the day Christ analyzes us and our church.

The point is God uses our lives in this lost world as an observable witness or testimony either for His grace or His judgment. When we live our lives in a God-glorifying way, God will use us and our testimony for His purposes. Sometimes that purpose may be to draw others to Himself and sometimes it may be to bring condemnatory judgment against the unbeliever. The point is God will use our behavior in regard to His convicting work concerning others. Those false allegations that were made against you will end up glorifying God because God will show that they were not true. He will show that you lived your life as a citizen of heaven in a God-honoring, God-glorifying way.

This entire God-glorifying work takes place when you abstain from fleshly lusts that war against your soul. When you do abstain, you show you are a citizen of Heaven.