

## This Exiled Life – Part 2

### Foreign People Here

1 Peter 2:11-12  
Nate Irwin

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<sup>11</sup> *Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.* <sup>12</sup> *Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.* 1 Peter 2:11–12 (ESV)

What do you think when you see a foreign family move in down the street? Some of us may have positive feelings, like, *Cool! It will be neat to meet them and find out about their country.* Others of us, if we were to be honest, may have some angst, like, *I wonder what they're going to be like. Will I be able to talk to them? or I hope our neighborhood doesn't change for the worse.* But all of us would think one thing for sure: *These folks are different from us. They've come from a culture that has taught them values and behaviors, a worldview that is unlike ours, which makes them different deep inside.*

This is what our study in the book of 1 Peter has been about. Only we're the ones who have moved into the neighborhood. It's a little difficult to grasp because we actually haven't moved anywhere—but something deep inside us has changed, and that has made us different.

Did you catch in last week's sermon what has happened to those who have believed in Jesus, the Cornerstone? Those who had not received mercy, who were under the wrath of God for their sins, now in Jesus have received mercy. The Greek word means *pitied*. Those who were not a people, who had no connection with God and no real connection with any other community of people, have now, together, become the people of God, a people for His own possession. No longer are we the people of America or of Indiana or of Carmel. We are the people of God, and the new people of God are now foreigners in the world. We are **foreign people here**.


As the people of God living now in a foreign outpost, we face two distinct challenges: a negative, private one; and a positive, public one.

#### I. **WAR**, v. 11, the internal battle for our soul


Notice how the sentence is structured:

*Beloved...*

*I urge you...*

 *As sojourners and exiles*

***Abstain from the passions of the flesh***

 *Which wage war against your soul*

1. **Beloved.** This is a word used to introduce a new section of the letter. Peter has been talking up to this point in fairly theoretical, theological terms about all that God has done for us in His Son and in

His Word. Now, somewhat like Paul does in a number of his epistles, he is about to move into the practical application of all that theology. So what? He will talk about this for the rest of the book.

But with this word, Peter is also reminding these believers in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia—essentially modern day Turkey—that even though they have been displaced in this world, they are very dear to God. And what he is now going to ask them to do comes not strictly out of duty but out of relationship; because they have been so dearly loved as to have the Son of God die on their behalf, the request to become more like the Son should not be a burden at all.

2. **I urge you.** This word, *parakaleo*, does not carry the weight of an apostolic hammer, like “I command you in the Lord”; rather it is more of a beseeching, appealing, urging, inviting, even begging. He is saying, “Please, please, please, if you want what’s good for you, do this . . .”

3. **Abstain from fleshly lusts.** The word “abstain” is very clear; it means, simply, in the words of the famous Greek goddess, Nike, “Just Don’t Do It!” It means to hold back, keep away from, to keep your hands off. The verb tense is the present, middle infinitive, thus “to keep constantly holding one’s self back from fleshly lusts.”

4. **Which war against the soul.** There is a war going on—and the stakes are our very selves. But now we need to answer three questions about this appeal in order to understand it fully.

1) What do we abstain from?

The word for desire, *epithumia*, is a positive word; it just means something that you want. Jesus said in Lk 22:15, I eagerly *desired* to eat this Passover with you, and Paul, in Phil 1:23, *desired* to depart and be with Christ. The passions of the flesh, *epithumion sarkikon*, are the desires, the longings, the cravings of our bodies; but it’s more than just our bodies, it’s the whole physical part of our existence that is opposed to the world of the spirit as it relates to God. In Gal 5:16, Paul uses the exact same phrase, where he says the desires of the flesh are set against the Spirit and that the desires of the flesh give birth to the works of the flesh, which are evident: “sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these.”

But let’s just start with our physical bodies. I thought about my body and what it desires, and here’s the list I came up with: food, drink, air, exercise, rest, sleep, comfort, sex, touch. That may not be an exhaustive list, but it’s a start. If you have a body, you’re probably tracking with me. So if I were to abstain from all those things, what would happen? I would be dead within a matter of minutes.

So what is Peter saying here? God has created our bodies and their desires, and they are good. All of them! So why do we need to abstain from them? The point is that God has not only created our desires; He has designed pathways for them to run in. When they run in those channels, it is beautiful. But when they overflow those banks, we run into trouble. When the object of our desires is forbidden, it is a bad desire. Food—too much or wrong kind? Drink—all God has made is good, but too much and we get drunk. Rest—you need the right amount. Same for exercise. Sex? Certainly Peter had this in mind in 4:3. This may be the area we most often run outside of God’s designed channel. Sex, as created by God, is a drive that is only to be fulfilled within the bounds of marriage, between one man and one woman. Anything else is a passion of the flesh that, for the people of God, is to be abstained from.

## 2) Why?

Because they wage war against the soul. The "soul" is the seat and center of our inner lives—who we are deep inside, our inner life, that which makes us who we are, the part of us that relates with God. Deep down in there, there is a battle going on, and it is for our souls. By their very nature, these desires are like mutineers, capable of raising an insurrection and waging a campaign against our soul.

Many people in Peter's day believed that the body and soul were separate, that there was no influence from one to the other. But the Bible teaches differently. While body and soul are distinct, they are not separate. What happens in the body affects the soul. What Peter is saying is that when we give in to the illegitimate desires of the body, it has a debilitating effect on our souls.

What does that look like? When we sin, we move away from what our souls were designed for, and that is God Himself. We're weighed down with a guilty conscience. We lose joy, peace, and interest in the things of God. We cease to be alive to God. We lose interest in serving. We lose the ability to worship and appreciate the beauty of God. Our soul becomes damaged. We'll see in chapter 4:2 that those who live for human passions cannot live for the will of God.

One writer put it this way: The emotions excited by the passions in the senses do not obey the orders of our will. They dissipate the spirits, weaken the memory, and wear out the brain. They reduce the soul to a state of slavery to the body, over which it ought to rule.

Another said: Fleshly lusts attack and conquer the inner life, and lead it into captivity, impairing its energies, sully its purity, lowering its tone, and cutting off the locks of its moral strength. Remember that when you are tempted—you are exposing yourself to a diminution of spiritual force. No act of sensual indulgence is possible without inevitable injury to our true selves. In a passion, a man's mind is limited, his soul is in chains.

And long-term we're endangering its eternity. Piper speaks of "our suicidal love affair with sin." I recently saw an illustration of black widow spider who kills and eats her partner after mating. I just read a new study that found that male black widow spiders look for females that have just had a big meal!

Our battle is not against people—they are our mission field—but against ourselves. D.L. Moody said, "I have more trouble with D.L. Moody than with any man I know." The flesh is a good servant but a bad master. The strong desires of our sinful nature "wage war" (*strateuomai*, "strategic") against the soul. The verb speaks of carrying on a long-term military campaign, not a skirmish or one-time battle.

John MacArthur said, "Fleshly lusts are personified as an army of rebels who intend to capture, enslave, and destroy the human soul. The verb implies not just antagonism, but constant and malicious aggression. Fleshly lusts wage an incessant search-and-destroy mission against us." They promise contentment and embrace the soul so as to strangle it.

### Additional Thoughts:

The happiness and pleasantness of our estate in Christ set us above the need of the pleasures of sin. Men are so much set upon sensual delights because they know not the higher pleasures that are proper to the soul.

The serving of the flesh sets man below himself, down amongst the beasts. But communion with God raises us above ourselves and associates us with the angels.

We should mind our journey homeward, suspecting dangers in the way, and so walk with holy fear.

Fleshly lusts are so far below the soul that they cannot content. They are pernicious enemies of the soul, use all stratagem and sleight.

Men who reject religion and serve their passions are kindling those lower fires at the expense of everything fine and beautiful in their higher nature.

### 3) How?

This is hard! Is there a clue in the text as to how we are to achieve this? As sojourners and exiles. Two words that are close to synonyms. The term *sojourner* emphasizes the temporary nature of our being here in this world—it's only for a short while. The term *exile* focuses on our status. We are non-citizens; we don't have any rights here.

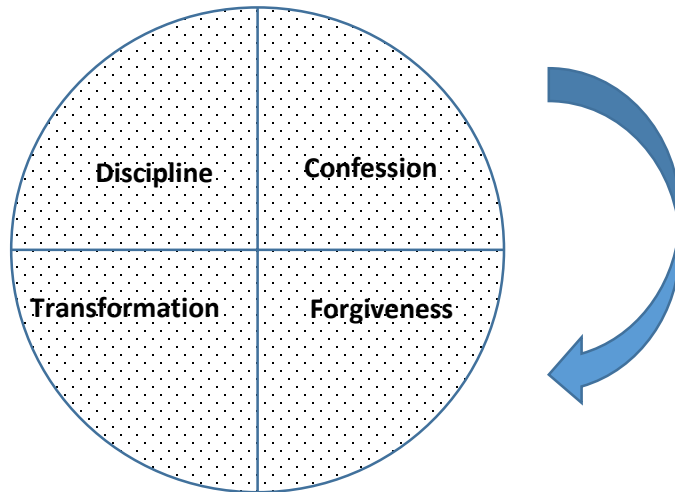
What does this world tell us? That all our desires are good and that to be true to ourselves, we actually need to gratify those desires. God made me this way so it's okay to be me. This is the stuff we hear and see all the time, in person and in media. It makes a lot of sense to the human mind. It is this world in which we live. But we are now foreigners here. We have a new mindset. We don't believe the old any longer. We were fooled once, in the garden, when we believed that if we ate the fruit, we would live, when instead we died. We won't be fooled again.

What would you think if the foreign family invited you for dinner? Your first question, I bet, would be, "What will they serve?!" You might be served eels in Laos, or tarantulas in Cambodia. Are these temptations? Not for us, because we've got a different operating system, a different culture. Peter is saying that as Christians, we now have a different way of looking at the world. You have come to believe God when He says that the desires of the body war against your souls so that you literally don't want to indulge them because of the consequences.

Yet the challenge is that we really do like fulfilling the desires of the flesh. They are far more tempting than the eels. So what do we do? The word from the apostle is *abstain*. Just stop it. Don't do it. Paul said it this way in Romans 6:12-13: "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness." And in I Thess. 4:3-5, he said, "For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality, that each of you learn how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God." We need to follow Paul's urging (same word) in Rom. 12:1: "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God."

You may be thinking, *I've tried and I just can't. It's no use just telling me not to, I can't stop myself. And where is the Gospel here anyway? This sounds just like any other religion, telling me not to do bad stuff. I thought Christianity was different.*

We must understand that not all the truth of the Christian life is revealed in any one or two verses. We must take the whole teaching of Scripture together; of which this is but a piece. But it's an important piece. Here is one way I've tried to put this together:



We generally take pretty good care of our bodies. When we go in for a physical and the doctor says our cholesterol is up or our blood pressure is too high, we take notice—and most of us take steps to improve our health. This morning is a chance to do a physical of your soul. So what is the state of your soul this morning? Has it been battered by the war? Are you ready to bring it back to health by stopping the bleeding that letting the passions of the flesh run riot has caused?

Additional Thoughts:

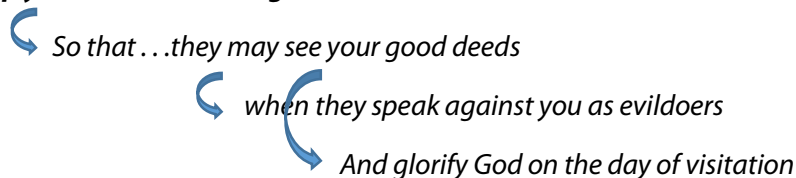
“Temptations will come, but if they be not made welcome by you, ye have the best of it; be jealous over yourself, and your own heart, and keep touches with God; let him not have a faint and feeble soldier of you.” Samuel Rutherford, “The Loveliness of Christ”, p. 49

Caesar once said that in other battles he fought for glory and in Africa against Pompey, he was obliged to fight for his life. Your precious soul lies at stake in this conflict. We are born to greater things than to be servants of our bodies.

## II. **WITNESS**, v. 12, the external battle for their souls

Again, let’s diagram the sentence:

### **Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable**



1. **How** do we witness? Keep your conduct honorable. The NIV translates it as “Live such good lives,” meaning winsome, attractive, beautiful, excellent, praiseworthy, fine, or noble. It is a goodness which can be seen by others. The whole tenor and character of our lives is to be something that is considered good. Even though we are now citizens of a different country than the unbelievers around us, there is common grace to see and understand what is truly good.

Is part of keeping our conduct honorable the abstention from fleshly lusts, from v. 11? Perhaps. It's certainly true that our outward witness will only be as effective as our inward character. We can't preach one thing while living another and expect anyone to change.

I think the phrase means more than this, for it goes on to talk about the unbelievers (Gentiles) seeing your good deeds. Abstaining is not a good deed; they're not impressed with abstinence. In fact, our abstinence is one reason they speak evil against us (4:4).

2. **Why** do we witness? Because they speak against us as evildoers. Why is this a bad thing? Shouldn't we just take it and move on? No, for we are the people of God, and when people speak against us, they are speaking against God—and He isn't okay with that. We must counter that so that they get the correct impression of God. Christians were accused in Peter's day of atheism, cannibalism, treason. When we don't run with them they feel judged and hold that against us. So what do we do about that? The answer is simple: good deeds.

What would you think if the man of the foreign family that moved in down the street had a beard and a turban? If you're like many, your thoughts would take a negative turn. You would lump him in with some others of his religious persuasion who have done and who condone evil deeds. How could he win you over? By sitting you down and explaining the tenets of his religion? Even if his arguments were plausible, you would be reluctant to come over to his side—because of what you have seen and read about what others of his religion have done. But suppose he came over and shoveled you out of a snowdrift? And his wife brought over trays of food when your wife was sick? It would begin to change your perception of him and of what he believed.

That's how our witness works. We are called to proclaim the excellencies of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light (2:9). But just how do we do that? Peter goes on and explains that as long as we live in an alien and hostile world, words will scarcely ever be enough. We must do good, good that can be seen, as Jesus said in Mt. 5:16, from which Peter no doubt got this idea, "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

When they see the proof of our faith, they will begin to think about the object of our faith, our God. How do we overcome evil? By good, according to Rom. 12:21. In this verse, the one "evil" is sandwiched between two "goods"—and so it is overcome. The great Scottish preacher Alexander MacLaren said, "The world takes its notions of God, most of all, from the people who say that they belong to God's family. They read us a great deal more than they read the Bible."

We have friends who felt led to give their old car away to an unbelieving friend. Then when that engine blew up three weeks later, they paid for half of the repair. It doesn't make sense, but that's the whole point. God, by His Spirit, will lead us as His people to do things that don't make sense—but they do make a profound impact on a skeptical and unbelieving world.

3. The **result** of witness. The result is that unbelievers will then glorify God on the day of visitation. God's visitation in the Bible refers to His coming to earth in either judgment or salvation, and in the New Testament it is used exclusively in this positive sense. So, although the phrase could refer to the final judgment, there seems to be a salvific sense to this verse that would imply His visitation before the final judgment, the day God visits someone by the convicting work of His Spirit, when He opens their eyes to see their sin and His grace. They've been brought there, in part, by seeing the good lives

of the followers of Jesus. They think, *Yes, now it all makes sense, I knew there was something different about those people and now I know why and I, too, want to become like that by giving Jesus my life.* It is amazing to think that our good living could result in people's salvation—and more lives to glorify God!

As Stephan Bauman wrote on p. 74 of *Possible*, "Deeds tell the real story of faith. They differentiate true religion from false, and they say a whole lot more about the quality of our faith than words do."

Men will feel the need of the change they see in us. All religion which does not lead to a life of good works is a counterfeit. It is bad money, which will never pass current at the court of heaven.

The world is watching us, more closely than we realize. This is the same word in 3:2 of unbelieving husbands observing the conduct of their wives.

In the summer of 1805, a number of Indian chiefs and warriors met in council at Buffalo Creek, NY to hear a presentation of the Christian message by a Mr. Cram from the Boston Missionary Society. After the sermon, a response was given by Red Jacket, one of the leading chiefs. "Brother, you say that there is but one way to worship and serve the Great Spirit. If there is but one religion, why do you white people differ so much about it? Why not all agree, as you can all read the Book? Brother, we are told that you have been preaching to the white people in this place. These people are our neighbors. We are acquainted with them. We will wait a little while and see what effect your preaching has upon them. If we find it does them good, makes them honest and less disposed to cheat Indians, we will then consider again of what you have said."

Give not only money but the gold of time to do work for God and His church and the souls of others.

## **CONCLUSION**

If you have decided to follow Christ, if you have received His mercy and become a part of the people of God, then you are the **foreign people here**. One day we will be there, and these battles will be over. But for now, while you and I live here as aliens, and for a short while, we have a war to fight—with His help. And a witness to give—to His glory.

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