

1 Peter 2:11-12

Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul. Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may on account of your good deeds, as they observe them; glorify God in the day of visitation.

Once again Peter is reminding us that we are aliens and strangers in the world.

He is urging, or exhorting and he is encouraging us as such to abstain from fleshly lusts because these lusts, these passionate longings or desires wage war against the soul.

The result of this war is eternal condemnation.

Peter is saying that there is something about us that makes us different. We are aliens and strangers.

Now Christians come in all shades of hue and color. We are brown, red, yellow, black and white. We wear dresses, suits, dashikis, saris, sandals, shoes, sneakers and some go barefoot.

We are teachers, mechanics, factory workers, administrators, and salesman.

We live in small houses, larger houses, huts and in prisons.

We like sports and we do not like sports.

In these and in so many other things we are no different from those in the world in which we live.

We are all made in the image of God and until we are made God's own possession by his mercy and grace we are all the same in our fallen state of sin.

But God has made His own different.

We are to be holy even as He is holy.

Simply put this means that as God is different from all He has created we are to be different from other men.

The way in which our difference can be readily known is by our moral behavior.

The world is an amoral place. It really does not care about morals in an absolute sense

and so immorality is very much tolerated, not universally but by matters of degree.

Certain immoral behavior according to God's standard is tolerated by the world depending on the circumstances of how one is affected by certain immorality. Often, if something immoral by God's standard has no direct effect on a person in the world, then it will be tolerated, as long as it does not interfere with one's life.

Often, a Christian sense of morality becomes politicized.

Many moral issues that are biblically based on God's holiness become the center stage for politics and the morality is really left out. The issue becomes more of a difference of opinion on what rights someone has as opposed to a purely moral issue.

This is how Christians get swept up into right wing politics and the Moral Majority and the Christian Coalition, neither of which were exclusively moral or Christian.

I do not need Rush Limbaugh representing worldview. If I am Christian and happen to be a political conservative perhaps I agree with Rush on political views, however his world view is not rooted in the Scripture, it is not a biblical world view anymore than Jerry Falwell's or Pat Robertson's view is biblical one they make it political.

So what we engage in are culture wars that are really removed from the Scriptures although some appeal is made to the truth of Scripture for the basis of the political process.

But we are not called to change the world through politics.

As I said last week we have a legitimate call to be nation builders through the preaching of the gospel, which enlarges the kingdom of God and His holy nation on the earth.

Peter is exhorting us to abstain from the immoralities that in the end cause the ruination of the soul.

Mt 16:26 "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"

This is the war that Peter is talking about.

The world in darkness cannot see this truth; it is absolutely blind to it. Man in the darkness of his own heart lusts for darkness and hates the Light. In darkness as we said last week man cannot see himself for what he really is in the sight of God.

So we are not to be engaged in the passionate desires of a darkened and sinful soul.

We are to abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.

Remember when we studied that we are to conduct ourselves in fear during our stay on earth earlier in the letter I Peter 1:17. We are to:

1: fear the behavior that leads to destruction. In other words are we living, as a Christian, in a way that the bible says leads to destruction?

2. fear conducting yourself in way that shows that the blood is not precious to you.

Are we making light of the precious blood of Christ in how we live?

This healthy fear causes us not to take our salvation for granted. Not to rest in a false understanding of believing that once we have experienced grace that saves us we do not have to be concerned with how we live.

So Peter is urging to abstain from fleshly kinds of immoral behavior that are proven by God's word to bring destruction to the soul.

This is what truly makes us holy, different from other people.

We have a deliberate and conscious standard of morality that is based on God's purpose for us, to be holy as he is holy. Our standard of morality is different than the morality of the world. This is why we are aliens and strangers; this is why we are different. Aliens and strangers stand out in any community. We will not stand out by our clothes, our work, and our food or our hobbies but we will stand out because of our morality.

This will be outstanding because it is not a priority for the world.

Self-indulgence, self esteem, degrees of hedonism and self-satisfaction are the

standard of the world and they are blind to the absolute standards of God and His morality and will lose the war against the soul, which is perpetrated by our very own sinful nature

If the soul is lost, the whole person is lost. And there is no way to negotiate to get it back. When this war against the soul is over, it's over. There is a great gulf fixed and none can cross one way or the other from heaven or from hell (Luke 16:26).

Peter exhorts that the aliens are to have an excellent, a commendable, and a right behavior.

This means our behavior is to reflect the standards of Gods holiness, His and our being different from the Gentiles, in the broader sense meaning the world, although Peter is writing to Jewish believers who understand culturally and now in light of Christ what ungodly behavior is.

And the purpose of this moral living is the glory of God. This is where the real battle lies; it is about the glory of God.

We will be slandered and accused of many things but in the end God will be glorified by how we lived as being different people, as aliens and strangers and as Peter later says as good citizens where ever we are.

“There is no column in the newspaper, there is no public service announcement on the radio, there is no sound bite on television, there is no values-clarification course in our schools, there is no government agency or even a welfare pamphlet that counsels us how to wage war for the eternal life of our souls. We are told how to wage war against AIDS; against sunstroke; against mosquitoes; against drunk driving and pollen and depression and rape and fire and theft and cholesterol and dandelions. But the world we live in gives no counsel on how to fight for the eternal life of the soul.” John Piper

Why? The world does not care. It is not a priority. Absolute truth from the One who is the Way, the Truth and The Life means nothing to the world reveling in its heart of

Was absolute morality a concern for you before Christ saved you? I don't think so.

By our living according to God's morality we will be called evildoers, Peter says. We will be singled out as the ones who really have a problem. Upholding and living the truth of Scripture will call us evil for even daring to say that another person is a sinner and deserving of hell.

You may be the most pleasant and gracious neighbor on the block, but once you have a serious biblical discussion about the penalty for an immoral lifestyle you will be judged by most and perhaps tolerated by some.

Once you inform someone that their child or husband, or wife is not a victim but an active sinner whose own wicked nature is encouraging their self destruction you'd better duck. And if they do slap your cheek, then turn the other to them.

Our job is not to hit back but like Rocky Balboa says in street language that rings true to Scripture, "But it ain't about how hard you hit, it is about how hard you can get hit and keep moving forward, how much can you take and keep moving forward."

Rocky is talking about winning a fight. We are talking about winning the war, the only one in the end of human history that really matters.

John Bunyan called it the Holy War:

When the giant had thus engarrisoned himself in the town of Mansoul, and had put down and set up whom he thought good, he betakes himself to defacing. Now there was in the market-place in Mansoul, and also upon the gates of the castle, an image of the blessed King Shaddai. This image was so exactly engraven (and it was engraven in gold), that it did the most resemble Shaddai himself of anything that then was extant in the world. This he basely commanded to be defaced, and it was as basely done by the hand of Mr. No-Truth. Now you must know that, as Diabolus had commanded, and that by the hand of Mr. No-Truth, the image of Shaddai was defaced, he likewise gave order that the same Mr. No-Truth should set up in its stead the horrid and formidable image of Diabolus, to the great contempt of the former King, and debasing of his town of Mansoul.

Moreover, Diabolus made havoc of all remains of the laws and statutes of Shaddai that could be found in the town of Mansoul; to wit, such as contained either the doctrines of morals, with all civil and natural documents. Also relative severities he sought to extinguish. To be short, there was nothing of the remains of good in Mansoul which he and Willbewill sought not to destroy;

for their design was to turn Mansoul into a brute, and to make it like to the sensual sow, by the hand of Mr. No-Truth.Ô

We are to advance unto the glory of God until God will be glorified on the day of visitation, meaning the final day of judgement.

We are to abstain form the world's immorality

The second great issue is mentioned in verse 12 - the issue of the glory of God. In verse 11 the issue is how the soul might not be destroyed. In verse 12 the issue is how the glory of God might not be belittled:

"Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may on account of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation."

The goal of human behavior is the glory of God. "Keep your behavior excellent so that . . . the gentiles might glorify God." The positive significance of our lives is derived from whether our lives direct people's attention to the glory of God.

If we live our lives in such a way that they don't point people to the glory of God, then our lives are without positive significance from a Christian standpoint. What we become is just an echo of a God-neglecting culture. We fit into the world so well that our lives don't point beyond the world. We are no longer aliens and strangers, but simply conforming citizens of the God-ignoring world.

But from the Biblical standpoint the greatest issue in this world is the glory of God. "Keep your behavior excellent so that they will glorify God." As far as God is concerned your life has positive significance to the degree that what you do from the time you get up in the morning till the time you go to bed at night points people to the glory of God.

David Wells writes in his book called God in the Wasteland,

"It is one of the defining marks of Our Time that God is now weightless. I do not mean by this that he is ethereal but rather that he has become unimportant. He rests upon the world so inconsequentially as not to be noticeable. He has lost his saliency for human life. Those who assure the pollsters of their belief in God's existence may

nonetheless consider him less interesting than television, his commands less authoritative than their appetites for affluence and influence, his judgments no more awe-inspiring than the evening news, and his truth less compelling than the advertiser's sweet fog of flattery and lies. That is weightlessness. It is a condition we have assigned him after having nudged him out to the periphery of our secularized life. His truth is no longer welcome in our public discourse. The engine of modernity rumbles on, and he is but a speck in its path .”(p. 88).

Peter has mentioned twice already (in 1:1 and 1:17) that true Christians are aliens and exiles and strangers on the earth. Here in verse 11 he mentions it a third time, "Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers . . ." He must regard this as important. So we should too.

It will help us restore the weightiness and importance of God in our world if we remember that we are aliens and exiles. The reason we are aliens was given in verse 9: "You are a chosen race a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession . . . he called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." We belong to God, not to the world and not to America. We learn to live from Christ and not from anyone else.

I may learn to live from you but only if you are living according to Christ otherwise you have nothing to teach me that will nourish my soul.

Now that does not mean that I should live like a monk and only learn spiritual things.

But Christ is to be the priority of my life. As I learn life skills and trades and other things that are needed to live in the world they need to be a part of my living for Christ. As I use these skills or apply my trade I do it as a Christian. The morality of my life needs to be seen, so that they who will call me evil may one day give glory to God at Christ's appearing.

The world cares not for the glory of God

O, what a fearful condition

When the heart of darkness rules in man's life

The end will be perdition  
How great was the darkness of my own soul  
Until Jesus revealed His light  
How unworthy I was  
And how glad I am now  
That mercy and grace gave me sight (J. Krygier)

We are the light of the world. We are the salt of the earth. It is not just speaking the truth of God's word that He uses for His glory. That is important because true faith comes from the hearing of the word and Peter later writes:

1Pe 3:15 But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear;

But here he says by observing our good deeds they may glorify God.

Our faithful living according to God's morals does affect men for good. It is part of the process God uses to call His elect unto Himself.

What we say and how we live are both used of God for His glory.

Just as we are to fight against those things that would cause us to demean Christ, those things we should fear that would be demonstrating that we may truly not be what we think we are, we should be waging war against the immorality that will attempt to destroy our living unto the glory of Christ and which will destroy the souls of men who do not know Christ.