

Godliness In An Ungodly World

By Make VerWay

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Bible Text: 1 Peter 2:11-12

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...Lord of all.

Would you take your Bibles this morning and turn to 1 Peter chapter two as we continue our time in God's Word together? 1 Peter chapter two this morning. I would like us to pick up the reading in verse 11 and read the whole of Peter's concept here down through verse 17. 1 Peter chapter two beginning at verse 11, reading down to verse 17 together. We are reading from the English Standard Version.

Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. 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.

Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.¹

We have been studying in the book of 1 Peter as the apostle Peter directs us on how we are to live in this particular world. Of course, the world in which we live is by the will of God. We live on this planet because this is where God wills that human beings are to live. There is no other option for us. This is the only option that he has made available to us. This is the option that is ours. We have not since our salvation, now that we are Christian men and women, we have not been transported by God to another place. God hasn't created on some other celestial planet this nirvana setting where Christians are to go once they become believers and live out their days there. Instead, it is the will of God for us as believing men and women that we live here in this place even as bad as this place is. Nor, beloved, does God desire that we form our own communes and live apart from the world in which we are in, separating ourselves from the culture and the people

¹ 1 Peter 2:11-17.

of whom we once were, the same kind of people that we were when we were called from darkness into light. God does not desire that we await death or Christ's return living in Christian communes apart from unsaved people in some way insulating ourselves from what we perceive to be all of the evil and the chaos that is a part of our culture.

And there is no question in any of our minds, I hope. There certainly is no question in my mind that the place that we live is ungodly. American is ungodly. The states of Minnesota and Wisconsin are ungodly. The town in which you live is ungodly. The neighborhood in which your house rests is ungodly. The street on which you live is an ungodly street. There cannot be and should not be in any of our minds any other conclusion but that the place that we live in is ungodly.

And not only does it have to do with the places, but it has to do with what makes up this place. Our economic systems are ungodly. Our entertainment is ungodly. Our governments, albeit that they are given to us as gifts from God, are ungodly. Our educational systems are ungodly. All of these and so many other characteristics of our culture are dominated by the character of the wicked one who in and of himself is evil and ungodly and we should not be surprised that all that he influences is evil and ungodly, too. And, really, it is only a willfully objective thought from a believer that thinks otherwise. If it is your conclusion that, hey, really, it all isn't that bad, then you have to conclude that thought on a willful basis, fully understanding all that is true, actual about our world in which we live that this is an ungodly place.

The fact of the matter is the New Testament is very clear on that. The New Testament tells us the reality of the place in which we live is that it is godless. And it needs God. Not only that, your present circumstances communicate that to you. You cannot watch a national basketball association game, you cannot watch it without being confronted in your face with the ungodliness that is our culture. And that is our entertainment. You cannot go down any major road in the twin cities without being confronted by some imagery on some billboard which is ungodly. If your children, like mine do, attend some or all of the educational system that makes up our educational system, your children cannot go a week to school without being confronted by the realities of an ungodly educational system. If your children are involved in a private school, albeit a Christian school, your Christian school children, as I was, as my children have been, cannot go one day in a Christian school without being confronted by the reality of ungodliness. It is the nature of the world in which we live. And our Lord gives instructions to all believers for how we should live here on this earth.

And this is the second section of this practical instruction that Peter gives to his readers. The second section is rather a long one. It goes from 2:11 to 3:17. It is the second section that deals with practical instruction. The first section, of course, we have already considered. It is in chapter one verse 13 through chapter two and verse 10.

So let's consider this morning what it is that our Lord says to us about how it is that we should live as godly people pursuing godliness even though the world in which we live is ungodly. Let's consider it in three phases which Peter gives to us in verses 11 and 12.

He opens verse 11 with a reminder. It is in that first word, the word beloved. It is a term that is widely used in the New Testament. Peter, of course, uses it here. The apostles James and John use it. The next apostle, Paul, is also very fond of the word, the term beloved. And while it is common to use that New Testament term, beloved, in the sacred writings, it is a very uncommon term in other Greek literature. It seems to be that it is almost exclusively in the ancient language a term that was used by believers for one another as opposed to a term that was generally used in the populace. And when Peter uses the term he uses it in a very succinct way to identify his thoughts about those who read his letters. They are loved by him.

You will remember in the preceding verses, verses nine and 10, he establishes the corporate identity of all believers. This group is loved by the apostle Peter and he is for them a nearby help. They are not distant thoughts to them. He is no mere talking head, simply from his position of piety as if he were the pope of Rome, for example, which he is not. As if from that position of piety he writes to them unknowing anything about them. No, he is very intimately involved in their lives. He has their best interest in mind. Whatever is going to follow is generated from the mind and heart of Peter under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, motivated by a sincere, intense desire to help these young believers and establishing in their own lives Christ likeness, what we call godliness in a world which is not given to that.

He is not going to flee from it. He did that in time past, remember? At a time when the other disciples could have used the leadership of the apostle Peter in their lives, at a time when it would have been great for one of them to stand up and say, "Guys, this is not the time to run away. Our Lord is on the cross and at bare minimum we should gather around his cross and pray for him."

You, of course, remember they fled at such a time. This is not that Peter. This is not the Peter who is fleeing in the face of ungodly opposition saying to each Christian, "Ok, you are on your own from here." No, this is a new creation in Christ who desires to help those who are the recipients of his writing. And he helps them because of the love that Jesus has given to him. He is a living example of one who can say, "I love you because he first loved me."

Any love that Peter demonstrates is not because, well, he learned at home to be a polite young boy and when you had opportunity to help people along the way. Peter's statement of love for these who share the corporate identity that he has is shared because his heart bears in its own meaning love that he had received from his own Savior which he now desires to give to others. What a beautiful thing for believers to say to one another. I call you beloved. I love you, because Christ has loved me.

I don't know if anyone in the room today came into the building this morning and greeted another one with the term beloved, as in, "Hello, beloved." I doubt that happened. You see that would be kind of awkward to say. It is not really part of the American culture and language to walk into a room, a gathering of Christian peoples and say that. Ok, I will

concede that. I will concede the terminology to you. But I will not concede the idea to you. I am fine if you say to me, "Pastor, come on. Cut me a little slack. Don't make me call everyone around here beloved." All right. I concede that. But what we cannot concede to each other is the idea that we ought to think and feel toward one another I love that woman. I love that man. And I love him because Christ loved him. And I love her because Christ loved her. She has all kinds of things that really get on my nerves. But Christ died for her and Christ loves her. And I share corporate identity with her and I love her because Christ loved her. And he is kind of weird. He can't hardly hold an intelligent conversation without taking it somewhere that is just kind of dumb. But Christ loves him. Not because he is worthy of Christ's love, but because he set his affections on him and because my Savior loves him, I will love him, too, because there is nothing in me that is worthy of Christ's love. And I may think I have it all together, but the fact is, I don't as demonstrated by the necessity that Christ had to die for me.

I love when he opens his statement with that word beloved. And I hope that you and I can view each other like that. You see, friends, I think this is true. Before we can talk about godliness outside of the body, godliness in an ungodly world, before we can talk about godliness in an outside body kind of way, we need to talk about godliness within the body and godliness within the body is demonstrated by love for each other.

I think it is a waste of time, beloved, for us to talk about keeping ourselves apart from the culture that is outside of these four walls if with inside these four walls we cannot and we are unable to demonstrate godliness toward each other because there is not a demonstrated love for the others. I am really glad he opened with that word beloved.

He moves to his exhortation. His exhortation is really found in that word abstain. The apostle Peter's instruction to the body is this. As you live in this world, you who make up what is called a chosen race and a royal priesthood and a holy nation and a people who are his own possession, verse nine. As you live in this world, abstain, he says, from fleshly lusts. It is not a command that Peter makes. And I do want you to understand this. It is a plea that Peter makes. It is not an admonition. It is an appeal, because, beloved, abstaining from fleshly lusts cannot be regulated by authority.

You see, as we will see, what Peter is concerned about first is what is what is going on in inward passions. His second concern is what happens in outside behavior. So the question that I would ask for you is this. How do you regulate what is within? How can I as your pastor, how can you as a parent, how can a teacher regulate to a student, how do you regulate what is going on inside in the heart? That cannot be done. What happens inside the heart must be dealt with inside the heart. This is why he doesn't regulate the inner passions, but instead he makes an appeal to you. He calls to you. He implores you to adopt this way of thinking about your own heart. And he says that you are to abstain from the passions of the flesh. Or your Bible might translate it fleshly lusts.

Well, what is it that falls under that category of passions of the flesh? The idea behind the wording is this. They are strong desires that are dominated by our flesh. Or maybe another dictionary way to put it would be this. They are cravings that are categorized by

our depravity. What we do know is this, that these passions of the flesh are unseen. In other words, it is entirely possible to have what is seen regulated while what is unseen is entirely out of control. What we also know is this, the bare desires that create immense tension within us.

I think it is interesting to note that Peter does not give a list of what these are. And maybe he does this for a couple of reasons. Let me suggest two of them to you. Maybe it is that Peter does not give us a list of what the passions of the flesh are because some of them are universal to all of us. For example, we are all sexual deviants. We express it in different ways, but that is true of all of us. It is a universal passion of the flesh. But there may be some passion of the flesh that is specific to you, one that a person sitting next to you does not deal with, but you deal with on an all too regular basis. The apostle Paul does give us a list. In Galatians chapter five he says this.

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies...²

And then just in case you didn't find yourself in the list, as hard as that may be to imagine, he also includes this.

“...and things like these.”³

So, in other words, we are all in this. All of us have passions of the flesh from which the apostle tells us abstain.

Now, you probably know for yourself what those passions are that are immediate to you. And you know it because of what the next phrase is in verse 11. And it really serves to identify for you what is going on in your heart and what is the passion of your flesh against which you deal. So look at the end, please, if you would, of verse 11 where he says that these:

“...wage war against your soul.”⁴

Do you want to know what the passions of the flesh are from which you ought to abstain? Where is the war taking place in your soul? Where is that happening? And, by the way, make no mistake about it. When Peter says that there is a war going on in your soul, that is not hyperbole used by a preacher so that you will pay better attention. When Peter says to you that there is a soul war going on within you, he really means that.

² Galatians 5:16-21.

³ Galatians 5:21.

⁴ 1 Peter 2:11.

What is happening inside of us? Beloved the Bible teaches us that there is an army of terrorists fighting against you. And they never fight fair. And you do battle against them every day. The language is such here that it is the idea of a military campaign against you. There is an organized strategized, full front attack on your soul. And it is not coming from outside of you. It is coming from within you.

You say, "What does it look like?"

For some people it looks like the desire to be recognized. I must be known. For some it looks like having my own way. I will do what is necessary to secure my own way. For some it is the feeling of approval. If I could just have people like me. For some it is the desire to exceed and excel to the point where that is consuming. Whatever the specific passion of the flesh that is true for you, beloved, make no mistake that the apostle is identifying this reality in every Christian woman or man in this room. None of us is exempt from this. It is not that the person who really has a problem with recreational drugs or alcohol and drunkenness. Well, that person is the one who has the war going on. No. The Bible says that everyone whom Peter would recognize as beloved, all who know the same Jesus Christ as he knows has within his soul a raging war going on.

And what is true in war? Nations have wars to do two things: kill people and destroy things. And the passions which wage against our souls are doing that same thing as well. They intend to kill you, beloved. These passions intend to enslave you so much so that at the slightest provocation it comes in and dominates in the situation. And what they do, beloved, is they will deepen the spirit of disobedience against God that naturally reigns within our hearts. And the apostle Peter says you must hold yourself back from this. When you sense within your person that raging war going on, abstain from that. Pull yourself back away from that. Hold yourself far back from that. Do not give in to the battle.

I love Matthew Henry on this, because I think he has got it exactly right. He says, "The grand mischief that sin does to men is this. It wars against the soul. It destroys the moral liberty of the soul. It weakens and debilitates the soul by impairing its faculties. It robs the soul of its comfort and peace. It debases and destroys the dignity of the soul. It hinders its present prosperity and it plunges it into everlasting misery."

Beloved, when the apostle Peter, when God himself says to us, "Abstain from the passions of the flesh which war against our souls," it is not because he is some cosmic killjoy. It is because he is a loving, benevolent God who desires that we do not become enslaved and experience the ruin of sin, not from without, not from without, but from within.

He gives the reason for this at the beginning of the verse. He says these things that war against your soul, these passions of your flesh, they are not characteristic of your native land. He says about us that we are sojourners and exiles. We live here, but we are not from here. We are sojourners and exiles here. Where we are from, heaven, the kingdom

of God, the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, where we are from, the standards and the customs of our lives and our native land is far superior to the standards and the customs of the land in which we find ourselves. This is the reason that he is giving this to us. And he is telling us. Don't allow yourself to embrace the standard and the customs of the world which you live in for a temporary period of time, because the standards and the customs of the place where you originate, the kingdom of heaven, those standards and customs are far superior. Those will actually satisfy your soul. Those will actually meet every longing of your heart. If you give into those passions of your flesh, what you will find out is that they are doing war against you for the express purpose of killing you absolutely spiritually and potentially physically, the former being much more severe than the latter.

When we look at a verse like this:

“Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.”⁵

This is where the Christian proverb comes from that we are to be in the world, but not of the world. It is sourced in this kind of idea.

Beloved, I approach you this morning in this text in the spirit of the apostle Peter himself. I cannot regulate your desires, nor do I want to as your pastor. I have enough to do to regulate my own desires, thank you very much. I cannot regulate yours. But like Peter, I desire to be to you. I can't urge you. And I can plead with every fiber of my being and I could express to you with every compassion of my heart to guard your hearts and to abstain from the passions of the flesh that wage war against your souls, beloved. If we are going to live godly in an ungodly world it will not begin with our outward conformity. It will begin as we abstain from these passions of our own flesh.

There is a third phase that the apostle gives us. And he tells us of an opportunity. Where verse 11 is inward, verse 12 is outward. Where verse 11 deals with desires and passions, verse 12 deals with conduct and actions. Where only you know the inward, verse 11, others observe the outward. I find it very interesting in verse 12 that he tells us to:

“Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable.”⁶

Here is what I find interesting here. Peter's concern is about what non believers observe in the conduct of unbelievers. I find that interesting because I have not experienced in my Christian life that that is usually what Christian people think. Usually my experience has been, maybe yours, that Christian people are far more concerned about what other Christian people think about their conduct. Agreed? Maybe that has not been your experience to the extent of mine, but it certainly is my experience. What if somebody sees me? And they don't mean an unbeliever. They mean a believer. What if my pastors sees me? What if my dad sees me? What if my mom sees me?

⁵ 1 Peter 2:11.

⁶ 1 Peter 2:12.

Peter's primary concern here is for what unbelievers see in our conduct, because he has already dealt with what should be a believer's concern. What should be a believer's concern is about what is inward, not what is secondary outward. If the inward is taken care of, the outward will take care of itself. For the outward he is concerned about what unbelievers observe in them. So he tells these Christian men and woman that they are to keep their conduct in this ungodly world. In other words, I am to give active attention to my actions. It is, as Peter has already said in 1:15:

"... as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct."⁷

What Peter is expressing to these Christian men and women is: This is no time for careless living. This is no time for careless living when unbelievers are in attack mode against you. That is what he says.

"Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers..."⁸

They are in attack mode against you. Now is not the time to be careless in your conduct to those who can only see in the outside expressions of your heart. So in what way were they in attack mode? And have you ever considered this? Let me give you a really quick list. In John 19 and 12 the accusation made against Christians was disloyalty to the state. In Acts 16 and verse 16 the accusation against Christians was that they upset commerce. In 1 Corinthians 13 and 13 the accusation made against them was that they were teaching that slaves are, in fact, free people. In Colossians two and verse 16 the accusation was made against them that they would not participate in community cultural festivals. In Acts 15 and 29 they were holding antisocial values.

These are the exact same charges leveled against believers today, the exact same ones: disloyalty to the state. Well, do you know what you are against? You are against same sex marriage, so you are disloyal to all the residents of the state. That is your problem. Legalize marijuana? You maybe have heard he argument. Do you have any idea how much revenue could be made if drugs were made legal or not sold in the underground market? You who hold to that should not be a part of our community. You are just upsetting commerce. The role of men and women in society, Christian men and women look at the Bible and see a wholly different way that God says a woman should be a woman and a man should be a man. It is not all that different from those who are accused of teaching that it is not right to slaves are free.

Colossians two and 16. I said to you that they were slandered against because they didn't participate in cultural festivals. That is true today. You don't go to your company's drinking parties. You don't go. You are not a part of that. And what comes back against you is some pretty vicious attack. To you Christ says, "Now is not the time for careless living. Keep your conduct holy among the Gentiles."

⁷ 1 Peter 1:15.

⁸ 1 Peter 2:12.

You are not going to your high school prom. Even though everyone says, “Well, it is just some kids getting together and hanging out and enjoying some music,” that really is good for them. You are not going to that, because you say that is not a place for a Christian girl or a Christian boy to be. All right. If that is the position you are going to take, which I believe is a good and right position for a believer to take, now is not the time for you to live careless then.

Holding antisocial views. Christians are homophobic, antisocial views. Christian people who are actually concerned about the education of their children, antisocial views. The point I am making to you is what Peter said to these people, the Gentile are attacking you severely. Keep your conduct honorable among them. The exact same ways that they were being attacked, is the ways that we are being attacked, too. And so the admonition comes to us. And what is the answer to these attacks? These charges are best answered by actions, beloved, not by words. What does my life convey to an unbeliever?

Do you see what he says? There is an opportunity here. And the opportunity is a gospel opportunity. He says in the verse that unbelievers will see your deeds and the result will be that they will glorify God in the day of visitation.

Well, what is the day of visitation? The best way to look at that is the day when they stand before Christ. All men will stand before him. For these unbelievers, think about this now and follow Peter’s thinking. For these unbelievers who stand in front of Christ, they will not in that day find him to be their judge anymore, but instead from their lips will go toward him expressions of glory.

Now I have a question for you. How can a spiritually unregenerate man express glory to Christ? Answer. He cannot. What must have come true of this? These individuals must have come to faith in Christ.

What the apostle Peter is teaching us is this. In order to have an impact on the world for God, if that is what you want to do, you, Christian man, you, Christian woman, you must be disciplined in an inward and private way by avoiding the desires of our flesh, that fallen nature with the result being that our outward conduct points others toward our God.

And sometimes that is going to be very routine. It is going to happen among your family as your family spiritually are Gentiles, you have a gospel opportunity before them. Take this as the Word of God and listen to what God says to you, Christian sister, Christian brother. When you are with your unbelieving family, they may live in your own house with you. When you are with them, keep your conduct before them honorable so that in the day of visitation they may glorify God having seen your good works.

Do you see the opportunity that God is giving to you, Christian sister? Do you see the opportunity God is giving to you, Christian brother?

It wasn’t long ago I had one of our newly saved men call me up and say, “Pastor, can we

come talk.” And we sat on one of the picnic tables right out here in the back. I think it was a Thursday afternoon, if I remember correctly. And he came to me and he sat down and he said to me, “Pastor, how do I get my family saved?”

Great question. Maybe you have asked that question. Here is God’s answer to you.

“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.”⁹

Sometimes this is routine. It is like this with our family or our friends. Some of you students, you wonder about this. You know people and there is something in your heart that is prompting you. This person needs Christ. And you know this girl or you know this boy and you would love to see them come to faith in Christ. God gives you methodology by which the potential exists for that young soul to come to know the same Jesus you know. What is that methodology he gives to you? He says to you, young student:

“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.”¹⁰

It might be that your good deeds are the very tool that God uses to bring them to faith in Christ as they hearing the gospel and seeing it lived out in your life come to faith and escape punishment in a real place called hell. He can use you in that way.

He tells us: Keep our conduct honorable. That means among our coworkers. That means at our kids’ sporting events. When bad plays happen and botched calls are made and your kid doesn’t get the playing time he should get, that means:

“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.”¹¹

That is our hope, isn’t it? Because isn’t it your greater desire that he dad of one of your kid’s teammates sitting next to you glorify God with you at the day of visitation than that he cheered because your kid finally got off the bench? Isn’t that your greater desire?

He says there was an opportunity here. Some of these are routine. And then some of them, beloved, are intentional. Like what? Like taking in crisis pregnancy women. I desire that these women see our good deeds so that they living with us and seeing honorable conduct, that they, too, glorify God in the day of visitation.

Some of them are routine. Some of them are intentional, intentional like that, intentional like being a foster parent. We want to bring a child into our home who does not have a home for the express purpose of showing before this young Gentile, honorable deeds so

⁹ 1 Peter 2:12.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

that this young Gentile will in the day of visitation glorify God. So it is intentional. Some of it is intentional like giving a year to go to China. Some of it is intentional like there is a housing community across the street from us. It is right behind Key Community Bank. I drive by it multiple times every single day. Some of you maybe don't, because you drive up and down Robert. You don't come on Upper 55th. There are hundreds of housing units there with hundreds of families in them. I drive by them and nearly every day I drive by and I will say, "Lord, how do we reach those people in that housing unit? They are right across the street from us. How do we reach those people?"

Somehow, Christian men and women, the hundreds of people who live in that place one block from us need to see from this body of believers, honorable conduct so that when every single one of them meets God he will be a Savior to them. There is an opportunity here. Living godless in an ungodly world is not about taking stuff away from us. It is not about I don't get to do things that other people get to do. It is about eternity. And real people with real souls going to a real place called heaven or hell.

Well, we see we are here for a purpose. The purpose that each of us has is that we are to live godly in an ungodly world. Let's ask our Savior to help us with that. Would you pray together, please?