

1 Peter 2:11-12
Apostolic Commands for Sojourners

¹¹ Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles [Gk: “aliens”] to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. ¹² 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 [Gk: “a day”] of visitation.

Prayer:

Lord, our heavenly Father, we are so grateful for the revelation of your Word. It speaks truth and life to us. Open up this portion to our understanding. Send your Spirit to illuminate it. Assist the preacher. Assist us all to hear your true Word and put it to work in our lives. In Jesus' name we pray.

Intro:

There are two things about apostolic commands:

They are authoritative because based on life and teaching of the historical figure of Jesus Christ, all of which truths are given and guided by the Spirit of the living God. They are given in love to the believers of those days, and to believers in all ages.

They are given in love despite the remaining sins and weaknesses of the Christian believers, in spite of their immaturity as Christian disciples.

Note how Peter follows this patten as he begins this section, “**Beloved.**” He is writing to people who are still wrestling with sins of the flesh. He is writing to people engaged in fierce internal spiritual battles – trying to conquer those old sins that try to cling to them like a wet T-shirt you’re trying to remove.

But Peter, just like Paul, was a great man of love. He loved the people of God. He loved them no matter their race or ethnicity – whether Jew or Gentile. So he begins his apostolic commands in this section with the word “**Beloved.**” He’s letting these saints know that he loves them. And that’s a major reason he’s giving them these strong commands.

Now let me explain that the commands of the apostles of the Lord Jesus are just as authoritative and binding on us as if the Lord himself issued them. He commissioned them to preach and teach all that he had preached and taught. They were to stand in his place and instruct the churches in the doctrine of Christ and the doctrine of the Christian life. They were inspired and guided by the Spirit, they were commissioned by him to speak in his behalf, so that when an apostle, under the guidance of the Spirit, issues a command, we, the church, are to take heed and follow it; obey it. It is the Lord himself speaking through his servant.

In these two verses of Holy Scripture there are just two commands - one we could say is negative and one is positive. One is something we ought not to do and one is something that we need to do.

What is the negative command? Look at verse 11: He says, **“to abstain from the passions of the flesh”**.

What does Peter mean here by “the flesh?” The word “flesh” in the bible can have several different meanings depending on its context; how it is used. It can refer to the physical body or it can refer to humanity in general (“all flesh shall see the salvation of God.” [Lu. 3:6]) Or it can refer to our sinful nature that we were born with and that causes us so much trouble by producing sin in our lives.

This latter meaning is what is being used here.

What exactly is the **...flesh...?**

It has been described as...“the impulses belonging to the to the selfish and lower side of human nature.” P. 571 (Rogers & Rogers)

Leon Morris: “The flesh...denotes the whole personality of man as organized in the wrong direction, as directed to earthly pursuits rather than the service of God’ p. 426, *New Bible Dictionary*

So “to be in the flesh” is be in a mindset, a behavior, that is consumed with human interests and human pleasures that leaves God and his will out of the picture.

Rom. 8:5-9 - ⁵ For ^(K)those who live according to the flesh set their minds on ^(L)the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on ^(M)the things of the Spirit. ⁶ For to set ^(N)the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷ For the mind that is set on the flesh is ^(O)hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; ^(P)indeed, it cannot. ⁸ Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

⁹ You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact ^(Q)the Spirit of God dwells in you.

So there is a way to be released from the power and bondage of the flesh, it is by the power of the indwelling Spirit of God. Without this indwelling presence of the Spirit there is no possibility of being captivated and immersed in the power of the flesh.

Examples of works of the flesh:

*Gal. 5:19-21:

⁹ Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, ²¹ envy, ^[a]drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you,

as I warned you before, that those who do^[b] such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Notice that that all 15 of these sins of the flesh don't all have to do with sins of the body, such as sexual immorality – meaning having sex outside of marriage – but these include also sins of the mind and attitude like enmity and jealousy and anger and envy. Sins of the mind and attitude and body – all of these are sins of the flesh – sins of selfish, self-centered humans who ignore God or deliberately rebel against God.

So what specific passions of the flesh is Peter referring to? I'm sure he's referring to sexual sins – to lust and pornography and promiscuity and adultery and homosexuality – as well as other sins of the body such as drunkenness and drug abuse, but I don't think we can limit these passions of the flesh to just sexual sins. We can be passionately angry or insanely jealous or uncontrollably envious or brimming with hatred or stubbornly unforgiving or constantly bitter – the mind and attitude can carry us off into sin also. All these things are opposed to God.

But those who are in Christ begin to develop a whole new mindset, a whole new way of thinking and relating to people. It's because the Spirit of God is working in their hearts through the Word of God to change us from the inside out.

Fruit of the Spirit: Gal. 5:22-24

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. ²⁴ And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

There it is! There's the secret – it's those "***who belong to Christ Jesus.***" He gives us the power to crucify the flesh - to put it to death. It's his power, not ours. Yes, we are involved in the whole process with the totality of our human nature, but it is he who is working in us to bring us along the path of sanctification – that is, becoming more separated from the world and all its evil practices and more separated out unto Christ and that holy way of living the marks those who belong to their holy Lord.

Peter is dealing here with this command for us **to abstain from the passions of the flesh.**

He begins by saying...

¹¹ Beloved, I urge you...

Other translations of "urge you"

Gk: I exhort you

KJV – I beseech you

R & R – I encourage you

The word “urge” here carries the idea of a strong appeal.

Other Examples in Scripture where this word is used:

Acts 27:34 - ³⁴ Therefore I urge you to take some food. For it will give you strength,^[a] for ^(A)not a hair is to perish from the head of any of you.”

Rom. 12:1 - ^(A)I appeal to you therefore, brothers,^[a] by the mercies of God, ^(B)to present your bodies ^(C)as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.^[b]

Now this appeal, this urging in Romans 12:1 from the Apostle Paul is not just a suggestion from him, or a subtle hint, or you can do this if you feel like it, but it’s like the Apostle Paul is throwing all the weight of his human energy and apostolic authority into this exhortation – it’s like he’s taking these Roman Christians by the shoulders and shaking them and saying, *“you’ve got to do this; you must do this. To please the Lord you must do this. It is your “spiritual worship” – the thing you ought to do because you belong to Christ Jesus. He gave his all in sacrificial love for you - you need to respond to him and put your life on the altar of consecration and dedication.”*

Henry Martyn was a man who put his life on the altar of sacrifice. He was an English missionary in the early 1800’s who dedicated his life to translating the scriptures in several of the Asian languages. He prayed, “Lord, let me burn out for you.” He died at age 31 of the plague in Turkey. He didn’t live long, but he lived well for Christ.

“sojourners” = “alien” = one who lives in a foreign country (R&R)

Peter gives two reasons why these Christians should abstain from the passions of the flesh.

The first reason is because their **citizenship**. He calls them **sojourners and exiles**.. Their real citizenship was now in heaven; the anchor of their souls was in heaven; their hearts and minds were no long glued on the earth and all its pastimes and pleasures and sins but was now fixed in another location – in heaven where Christ is seated at the Father’s right hand.

On earth they had become “foreigners, strangers, temporary sojourners” (R&R). The word is sometimes translated “aliens” – they belonged to another realm but they are temporarily living on earth.

There is a song that Brother Wayne used to sing at the Baptist Training Union on Sunday evening when he was a teenager called “I Am a Stranger Here.” We sang it earlier in the service. The first verse is:

I am a stranger here, within a foreign land:
My home is far away, upon a golden strand;

Ambassador to be, of realms beyond the sea.
I'm here on business for my King.

So as strangers here, as aliens within a foreign land, our lives should be characterized by an attitude of “detachment.” We live in houses and apartments, but our real home is in heaven where Christ is. We work at jobs but our supreme boss is the Lord Jesus Christ himself. We have family members to whom we're related by blood but even closer than blood relatives are the members of the church. These are often closer to us than our blood-relatives. We may have more in common. We have Christ in common. Of course, our blood relatives can also be Christians so that can give us a double bond with them.

The first reason Peter tells us to abstain from the passions of the flesh is because our hearts and devotion is not longer to this world but to another world – the world where Christ is king and Lord and ruler.

The second Reason he tells us for abstaining from the passions of the flesh is because they are spiritually dangerous to us. They are damaging. They wound us and tear us apart spiritually.

Peter tells us to abstain from them - to put away, to forsake them, to put behind us, to move away from them forever – to relegate them to the trash heap of our former lives.

Here are some other texts in the NT that use this word “abstain from.”

Acts 15:28-30 (decisions of the Jerusalem council to the Gentile believers. The letter read as follows:)

²⁸ For it has seemed good (A) to the Holy Spirit and (B) to us (C) to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements: ²⁹ (D) that you **abstain** from (E) what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.”

There were only four practices the leaders of the early church required of the newly converted Gentile believers: to abstain from eating food that had been sacrificed to idols, from eating blood or what had been strangled, and from sexual immorality. There was nothing else – the males didn't have to be circumcised nor did any of them have to keep the Law of Moses.

1 Thess 4:3 - ***For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality.*** This high standard of morality characterized the Christian people and it was noticed by other people in those cultures.

1 Thess. 5:22 - **Abstain** from every form of evil.

Peter is saying that these Christian people were to abstain from the passions of the flesh because they **wage war against your soul.**

This is a present tense verb – it is a spiritual fight that lasts throughout the Christian life. Do you find yourself tempted by the passions of the flesh? You are not alone; this is an ongoing battle in the Christian pilgrimage that we are on.

The phrase “wage war against your soul means that the passions of the flesh“ fight you, they carry on a military campaign against you, they try to conquer you. They try to pull you away from Christ and bring you back under their sways...” (R&R)

Other examples of use of the use of his term “wage war” in NT:

1 Tim 1:18-19- ¹⁸ *This charge ^(A)I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with ^(B)the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may ^(C)wage the good warfare, ¹⁹ ^(D)holding faith and a good conscience.*

So this fight we are in is a good fight; it is a noble fight. And we do it by and in faith and we seek to have a good conscience, a clear conscience, being faithful to avoid the passions of the flesh.

2 Cor. 10:3-5 - ³ “For though we walk in the flesh (*that is, in the body*), we are not waging war according to the flesh. ⁴ For the ^(A)weapons of ^(B)our warfare are not of the flesh but have ^(C)divine power ^(D)to destroy strongholds.⁵ We destroy arguments and ^(E)every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to ^(E)obey Christ...”

So we use spiritual weapons to fight the passions of the flesh. We use truth and prayer and submission to Christ.

The passions of the flesh are very dangerous. Satan would like to see us destroy ourselves by giving ourselves up to the passions of the flesh. Unfortunately, he has succeeded in millions of lives.

That’s why we must declare all-out war against him and against all these sins that would seek to destroy us. We must not yield for a moment...

Alan Stibbs: “By deliberate abstinence we must refuse to give [these sins] a foothold or taking-off ground.” P. 107

This is the negative command in this passage: to abstain from the passions of the flesh. Peter gives Two Reasons: because of our citizenship and because they wage war against our souls.

Now Peter gives **the positive command** – what we should do:

¹² **Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable...**

“Conduct “here has the idea of behavior – “goodness which can be seen by others”]

Other English translation:
 "...live such good lives..." NIV

"keep your behavior excellent.." NASB

To keep our conduct "honorable" means to maintain our own personal behavior in a way that conforms to the Word of God, that is in the fear of God, that demonstrates supreme love for God and love for others. It is behavior that is righteous and honest and morally pure and considerate and kind and unselfish. It is conduct that can be recognized by the people of the world as conduct that is conformity to a higher standard of righteousness and morality than is commonly found among people of the world. The Christian refuses to get drunk or be a glutton as far as food goes or take drugs or participate in sexual immorality. People may make fun of us and taunt us, but we do not yield to their pressure. We, by the grace of God, seek to remain faithful to Christ. Even if the whole world is going off into sin, we will not. We are on this earth to please Christ, not people. People are fallible and sinful; Christ is infallible and holy and by his grace we will follow him.

We are to do good deeds because this is one reason God has saved us. Having been transformed by the Holy Spirit we naturally begin to do things for the good of others, not just ourselves.

1 Pet. 3:16 - ¹⁶ (A)having a good conscience, so that, (B)when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame

2 Cor. 8:21 ²¹ for (A)we aim at what is honorable (B)not only in the Lord's sight but also in the sight of man.

Phil. 2:15 - ⁵ that you may be blameless and innocent, (A)children of God (B)without blemish (C)in the midst of (D)a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine (E)as lights in the world

Tit. 2:6-8 - ⁶ Likewise urge (K)the young men to be (L)sensible; ⁷ in all things show yourself to be (L)an example of good deeds, with (E)purity in doctrine, dignified, ⁸ sound in speech which is beyond reproach, (M)so that the opponent will be put to shame, having nothing bad to say about us

We live honorable lives in this world...

...so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

What is the Day of Visitation?

Alan Stibbs (p. 108) notes that Biblically "visitation" is a "special drawing near of God to deal with men either in judgment or in mercy." Stibbs believes this is likely the day when

God visits these people and uses the Christian people's good works to convince them of the reality of Christianity which is a means to bringing them to converting faith.

Others would interpret this as the day of Christ's return and the future judgment.

Whichever way it may work out, the basic idea is clear, that the good deeds, the good works of the Christian person, are evidence of true godliness, of the work of God in a human life, and bring glory to God.

So just being a genuine Christian believer in your daily life, in your interaction with people, in your doing good deeds, good things – you bring glory to God. Nothing that we do in the Christian life is insignificant.

Every good thing we do because of our faith at work in our lives is an evidence of the work of God, of his Spirit in a human life, and brings honor and glory to God.

When we abstain from passions of the flesh and instead demonstrate godly behavior, we bring honor and glory to God. When we live honorably before God and people, when we live a genuine Christian life, we bring glory to God.

After all, this world is no longer our permanent home; we are just here for a while, heading for a better country, a heavenly city whose builder and maker is God.

We've been given a new heart, a new nature, the inner presence of the Holy Spirit. The passions of the flesh no longer enslave us. Christ has broken their power.

As sojourners and exiles here on the earth, let us live for his glory and do all things to please him. Then we can be instruments to bring him praise in the earth and bring good to others. Hallelujah – what a great calling and life he has given us!

Prayer: Wonderful Father, out of darkness you have delivered us and brought us into Christ's light. Use us in your service and for your honor, we pray in Jesus' precious name. Amen.

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