

1 Peter 2:11-12 | “Holiness Within and Without”

Pastor Matt Brown

Good morning, please turn in your Bibles to 1 Peter 2, verses 11 and 12.

If you haven't been around recently, we have been working through the book of 1 Peter.

We have been taking small sections of it, and have really gone deep into its contents.

This is the way that I typically preach - working through a book verse-by-verse, expounding upon what it says.

Let's READ OUR PASSAGE and see what it beholds. *[pause]*

When someone starts a new job, usually there is a training period.

In this training period, you are trained by someone who teaches you how to do your job well.

So what happens first is that they will show you how to do the job, but as time progresses, they will allow *you* to do the job, while they watch you to make sure you are doing it correctly.

And what typically happens is that your trainer has to tell you to stop doing something.

So they will say, “Don't do this, as it's the wrong way to do it.”

But on the other hand, they also have to tell you what TO do.

So they will say, “Do this, as it's the right way to do it.”

And that's how you learn to do a job correctly, by hearing both things *not* to do and things *to* do.

Well in a similar way, Peter is like our trainer today, and he's determined to train us to live correctly in a hostile world.

And what he will do, like that trainer, is he will tell us what NOT to do and what TO do in our Christian lives.

And the theme that he will speak about is a life of holiness within and without. *[pauseeee]*

This is important to remember: a Christian ought to be pursuing holiness.

The Christian life is not a life where we are saved and then we just go on with our lives the way it has always been.

All throughout the Bible, there are calls for right living. *[pause]*

For some reason recently, there has been a tendency to neglect calling people to live a life of holiness.

At least part of the reason is because people have seen how legalism can easily creep into these kinds of things, but that doesn't mean we should abandon it altogether. *[pause]*

In churches, there has been this abandonment of calling people to live holy lives...

...But also, there are numerous individuals who live worldly lives and try to defend it by saying that the Bible calls you to judge not.

Or they will pull out the grace card and try to hide behind it, while simultaneously living like the world. *[pause]*

Sadly, overall, holiness has been a neglected topic in both our churches and our individual lives.

But we must read and believe the *whole* Bible, no matter what we feel like doing.

And the Bible emphasizes a holy life. *[pause]*

God knows that we need instruction on how to live a godly life, and so let's see how God instructs us to live.

First, we should...

I. Abstain from sinful desires

So the first exhortation that Peter gives is focused on our inward, personal holiness, that is, the holiness within.

In verse 11, Peter starts out by saying, "Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh."

This is an exhortation, as Peter is "urging" us to do something.

So Peter isn't saying, "If you want to abstain, then do it."

Or, "Maybe you guys should abstain, it would probably be good."

No, he doesn't take this topic lightly, but he is strongly urging, and earnestly imploring us to abstain. *[pause]*

There is a sense of urgency and importance in this command.

So that right there should get our attention - this is a big deal.

This "abstaining" is not something to be disregarded or taken lightly, but it is "urged" upon us as something to do. *[pause]*

Imagine that you went to the doctor and the doctor told you that you were extremely allergic to chocolate.

Eating chocolate for you would taste very good, but it would be extremely harmful to your body.

What would your doctor say? He would *urge* you to abstain from eating chocolate.

And this urging would get your attention, make you realize how serious it is, and how important abstaining from chocolate will be for your health. *[pause]*

Peter is doing the same sort of thing, but this exhortation doesn't come from a doctor, it comes from God...

...And it concerns a far more weighty subject because it entails your spiritual health. *[pause]*

Specifically, Peter is urging us to abstain from the passions of our flesh, and we would do well if we took this command seriously. *[pause]*

As you know, to abstain is to refrain from something.

It's to restrain yourself from doing something.

So to keep away from it, and continually abstain from these things. *[pause]*

And what are these "passions of the flesh"?

They are our sinful desires.

They are self-indulgent cravings and strong desires for things that are sinful.

These passions of the flesh displace our proper affections for God, and instead prop up our sinful desires in His place. *[pause]*

As Christians, we are not exempt from having these evil desires.

In Galatians 5, Paul actually talks about these fleshly desires.

In Galatians 5:16 he says, "But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify *the desires of the flesh.*"

And then he gives us some examples of what these fleshly desires lead to in verses 19-21...

"Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger," and the list goes on.

And even James talks about these passions in James 4:1-2...

"What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your *passions* are at war within you?

You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel." *[pause]*

James even explains what happens when we sin as he talks in chapter 1, verses 14 and 15...

“each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his *own desire*. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin.” *[pause]*

So these desires are those sinful desires that lead you to sin.

The opposite of the flesh and its fleshly desires is the Spirit and the fruit that the Spirit gives. *[pause]*

Some of these sinful desires can be seen when you lust after another person.

It’s when you desire to steal something from someone else.

It’s when you treat others badly because you want comfort.

It’s when you are mean to someone because it will feel good to get vengeance.

But we are called to say, “No,” to these evil desires and to abstain from them.

And that means that sinful desires *can be* fought and restrained! *[pause]*

As a Christian, you don’t have to be a slave to your sinful desires, for even in Galatians 5:24, Paul says...

“Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”

We are no longer under the dominion of these sinful desires, but we can resist them and abstain from them!

This is great news!

As we walk by the Spirit, we can abstain from giving into these sinful desires, and say, “No,” to them.

You don’t have to give in and say, “My desires are too powerful.”

But you can rely upon the Spirit and have victory over these desires. *[pauseeee]*

The life of a Christian means *not* following what feels natural because what often feels natural are our sinful desires.

Our feelings and desires are not all neutral!

Just because something feels right, doesn’t always make it right. *[pause]*

There will be a continual battle in the Christian's life, "for the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh."¹

So we must not be idle, but resist these desires!

We cannot give in, be passive, and let our sinful desires flourish in our lives!

We must go to battle!

The Christian life is one of active spiritual battle, for these "passions of the flesh...wage war against your soul." *[pause]*

God truly cares for us and wants the best for us, and so he's urging us to abstain from these passions for they wage war against our very souls. *[pause]*

Some people tend to think that God's commands are trying to make them miserable, but it's the exact opposite, he's trying to help us so that we don't destroy our lives. *[pause]*

Our passions are waging war, and so we can't sit back and do nothing and expect everything to go well.

We can't be lazy or downplay the need to abstain from these things - they are going to war against your soul! *[pause]*

These sinful desires are strong and dangerous!

As James and Paul pointed out: if let go, these desires lead to a multitude of various sins! *[pause]*

These passions of the flesh may seem harmless and even attractive at times, but they are not.

They are the enemy, trying to wage war and cause damage in your life.

They are fighting and seeking to inflict harm, seeking to destroy you from the inside out.

And this isn't a shallow or fake battle, but a real and deep battle not to be taken lightly. *[pause]*

If you don't do battle against these desires, they could wreck you by making you spiritually weak and ineffective. *[pause]*

Beloved, we are warriors, fighting in the power of the Spirit!

So go to war! Abstain from these passions of the flesh. *[pauseeee]*

A part of our motivation for abstaining from the passions of the flesh is because we are urged to do it and because they are dangerous, but also because we are loved by God. *[pause]*

¹ Galatians 5:17a.

Notice how Peter starts out this exhortation - he says, “Beloved.”

Before he ever starts talking about the need to abstain, he reminds us that we are loved by God.

We are dearly loved and valued by God. *[pause]*

We don’t do the commands of Scripture out of empty duty to a harsh master, but we do them for a loving Father.

It’s God’s love and grace that drives us to desire to say, “No,” to sin and, “Yes”, to holiness.

It’s because we remember the love of God in sending Christ to die for us, forgive us of our sin, and to free us from the bondage of sin.

It’s because we remember the love of God in adopting us as sons and daughters, and giving us the Spirit to aid us in our pursuit of godliness. *[pauseeee]*

Christian, you are loved.

Even amidst all the times that you gave in and failed because you didn’t abstain from your sinful desires, you were loved.

Even amidst all of your weaknesses and failings, you are called, “beloved.”

So rejoice in being the “beloved of God,” remember that God freed you from the dominion of your sinful desires through the Cross, and go to battle! *[pauseeeee]*

There are so many motivations in this passage to abstain from our sinful desires, which I’ve already given, but I’ll give one more...

Abstain because you are “sojourners and exiles.” *[pause]*

Look there at verse 11 once again, “Beloved, I urge you *as sojourners and exiles* to abstain from the passions of the flesh.”

This reminds us that as Christians, we are merely foreigners and temporary residents on this earth.

This isn’t our true home, but we are just passing through.

We are sojourners on this earth.

And since this is true, then it helps you to abstain from these passions because we have something way better coming.

Our values, lifestyle, and worldview should all be different than the world’s because we are only here temporarily.

We strive to live holy lives, realizing that this life is short and we look forward to our eternal home and inheritance. *[pauseeee]*

So how have you been doing with your sinful, fleshly desires?

Have you been a little too passive or idle?

Have you recognized the importance of abstaining from those desires, which lead to many sins and which wage war against your soul? *[pauseeee]*

Maybe you're here thinking, "Pastor Matt, you don't know the strength of my desires; you don't know how hard it is."

I agree they are strong, I know it takes effort, but I also know that God's grace is more.

I know that if the Bible calls us to do something that the Lord will give us a way to do it, and he has through the Spirit within us. *[pause]*

No matter what your past has been in the battle, let's all seek to abstain from sinful desires, as we are urged by God to do so.

When you feel that desire within you to get back at someone or say some hurtful words, abstain from it by remembering how dangerous this desire is and how important it is to refrain.

When you have that desire to lust after someone, remember that God's way is best, and you are so very loved by God, who desires you to not be in bondage to lust.

When you have that desire to covet someone's position or possessions...

...Remember that you are simply a temporary resident here on this earth, and you have something way better coming. *[pause]*

In each of these situations, or whatever sinful desire you face, rely upon God, cry out in prayer and dependence, and abstain from the passions of the flesh.

Don't give up if you have failed, keep crying out for deliverance.

Don't relax if you have been doing well recently, but always be alert and ready to go to battle. *[pauseeee]*

God truly cares about our inward, personal holiness.

And it's actually our holiness within which leads to holiness without.

That's what we will learn about in exhortation number 2...

II. Maintain good conduct among unbelievers

Verse 12 says, “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.”

Here’s another exhortation given to us by Peter, and I believe it’s connected back to his ‘urging’ in verse 11.

Meaning, he’s not only urging us to abstain from the passions of the flesh, but he’s also urging us to keep our conduct honorable. *[pause]*

If you notice how this passage is set up, Peter has told us about something to avoid, but now he’s telling us about something to pursue.

So first was the negative side - what NOT to do.

And now is the positive side - what TO do.

We were told to say, “No,” to sinful desires, and now we are told to say, “Yes,” to good conduct among unbelievers. *[pause]*

So to begin, let’s first unpack honorable conduct...

Conduct is our behavior and way of life.

And then honorable here is actually the word “good.”

It points to conduct that is morally good, and so that’s why many translate it as “honorable.” *[pause]*

So this is a life that is outwardly characterized by behavior that is good.

This would be someone who is displaying the fruit of the Spirit, and who is living according to God’s ways.

Jesus, of course, would be the prime example of someone who perfectly lived his life morally good and in an honorable way. *[pause]*

Someone with conduct that *isn’t* morally good would be someone who is sexually immoral, often has hostility and fights with others, envies others regularly, has fits of anger, etc.

This is someone whose conduct isn’t in line with godly conduct.

I believe we all know what ungodly conduct looks like by the way that someone talks or acts in front of others. *[pause]*

And so Peter is telling us to keep our conduct honorable.

The word ‘keep’ here is a call to maintain good conduct.

So don't just do it once, but keep it up and maintain it.

Good conduct should characterize your way of life. *[pause]*

And we are to keep this good conduct "among the Gentiles."

The way Peter is using Gentiles here is actually simply pointing to unbelievers.

It's like Peter sees the church as the true Israel, so anyone not a Christian is truly a Gentile, outside of God's people. *[pauseeee]*

God cares about how we live our lives in front of those who don't know Him.

There are some Christians who treat those who don't know Christ in bad ways.

They will fight with them over things, but how is that conducting your life in a morally good way?

Certainly, we are called to speak the truth in love, but we cannot move into ungodly conduct. *[pause]*

Our good conduct should be apparent to all in society.

Did you notice how Peter doesn't say to abstain from unbelievers, but to live godly lives among them!

We are not called to retreat and hunker down, but we are called to live our lives among unbelievers, living godly lives among them.

So we don't avoid them, but live among them.

But also, we don't become like them, but live honorably among them. *[pause]*

I've seen Christians start to morph their behavior in line with their unsaved co-workers, but this is not what we are called to do!

We are called to live differently than them!

We are called to keep our conduct honorable among them. *[pauseeee]*

Look at what it says next, "so that when they speak against you as evildoers..."

'Speak against' here means to slander.

It is when someone speaks evil of you, charges you falsely with something, accuses you of evil, or attacks your name or reputation. *[pause]*

There are two points I want to say about that line.

First, you should *expect* to be spoken against.

Now not every unbeliever will treat you this way, but there are many who will, so expect it.

Don't be surprised by this, remember you are a stranger and temporary resident on earth, so they will not like that.

They will want you to live the way that they live and to have the same values and priorities, but you aren't *of* this world.

Your conduct doesn't conform to their way of life, and it makes them hostile at times. *[pause]*

So expect this, but secondly, notice how their treatment of us doesn't change the call to live a godly life.

So many people think that if they are treated badly, that they can treat people badly in return.

They think that if they are reviled, that they can revile in return.

But that is not right!

When you do that, you are going against this passage!

You are no longer living honorably among them, but living in an *ungodly* way. *[pause]*

Maybe you're here today thinking, "But you don't know my co-workers. I just can't help it!"

Well based on the authority of the Word of God, I say, the way someone treats you never changes your responsibility to live a morally good life.

And the fact that God tells us to do this means that he wants us to live this way, and it's possible to live this way through His power. *[pauseeee]*

Peter also tells us the purpose of living this way...

"So that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation." *[pause]*

Your life is being watched, did you know that?

But what are people seeing? *[pauseeeee]*

Living a godly life actually has a bigger impact than you may think.

Some think that it doesn't matter whether they live godly or ungodly because it doesn't affect anyone, but it truly does!

People are watching!

Specifically, unbelievers are watching you.

They have heard that you are a Christian, and watch you.

Or they have slandered you, and they are watching to see how you will respond. *[pause]*

But what can happen when we live this godly life, even through being spoken against?

Some may believe and glorify God on the day of visitation! *[pause]*

Your good conduct can have a God-glorifying impact!

A Christian's life may result in an unbeliever's salvation, and then one day they will give glory to God on the last day.

Think of the power, especially of someone's good conduct, even though they are spoken against.

The unbeliever sees that, and wonders, how can they live like that?

How could they not slander me back? How could they not rise up in a fit of anger?

How could they still live this way?

And our good conduct bears witness to the fact that only God could do this, and it leads them to believe. *[pause]*

Isn't that amazing?!

Your good conduct among people may lead them to believe and then bring glory to God someday! *[pause]*

We bring glory to God by the way we live among unbelievers. *[pause]*

Jesus said a very similar thing in Matthew 5:16...

"Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." *[pauseeee]*

The easiest thing to do when you are spoken against is to follow the passions of your flesh, and live wrongly.

I admit it, that is tempting!

No one likes to be spoken against, and something in us bubbles up and tries to get back at them.

But think about the eternal impact that we could have by simply living a morally good life.

People could be saved by the witness of our conduct!

People could be saved and then give glory to God because of our response.

That's crazy to think about!

That unbeliever who treats you horribly could someday be saved and praise God partly because you chose to live a godly life in front of them. *[pause]*

Now certainly, they have to hear the Gospel at some point and believe it, but our godly life can lead them to start asking questions and look further into what makes us different. *[pause]*

Isn't it interesting how Peter tells us that when we are spoken against not to try to defend ourselves and get back, but rather to just live honorably.

Every time you are spoken against, keep up the good conduct.

Later on, Peter will say this good conduct will put them to shame because they are continually confronted with the fact that they are not true characterizations. *[pauseeee]*

Our good lives are mirrors reflecting back to God, and leading Him to get glory. *[pause]*

Does your life reflect the world or reflect a great God?

If our lives blend in with the world around us then that leads people to look to the world, but if our lives are different, it leads people to look up to God.

Only God could lead people to live godly lives in the midst of hostility, and that's why he will get the glory someday. *[pauseeeee]*

What this passage teaches us is that...

Holiness within and without is very important for living in this world!

Peter urged us to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against the soul.

This is holiness within that not everyone sees.

It's that spiritual battle that you fight daily as your strong, sinful desires go against the Spirit. *[pauseeee]*

And Peter urged us to maintain good conduct among unbelievers, so that some may believe and give glory to God.

This is holiness without, meaning, holiness that shows up on the outside, which people can evidently see. *[pause]*

Both holiness inside of us and the holiness of our conduct is important to God.

So don't neglect these things! *[pause]*

This isn't always easy, but it's important for living as sojourners in a strange land. *[pause]*

The Christian life is one of a pursuit of holiness.

We don't sit back and do nothing, we don't blend in with the world around us, but we live differently because we *are* different.

Jesus Christ has died for our sins and rose again victoriously.

He did the work, and we simply turned from our sins and placed our faith in Him. *[pause]*

By God's mercy, we have been born again and are now new creations in Christ with the Spirit residing within us.

Christ's work is the only reason that we can abstain from sinful desires and keep our conduct honorable among others. *[pause]*

So remember your new life and new identity.

Remember that you are a temporary resident on this earth.

And remember that you have been born again by the Word of God and have received great mercy. *[pause]*

We abstain from and go to battle against our sinful desires, but we *don't* abstain from or go to battle against unbelievers...

...Instead, we live godly lives, seeking to help them know God, and someday give glory to Him.